

FAITHFUL PRESENCE: HOW COMMUNITY FORMATION SHAPES  
THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CALLING

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*Christians cannot be distinguished*

from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life.... Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens.

*They have a share in everything*

as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed.... They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted.... They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance....

*What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world.*

The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but does not belong to the body, and Christians dwell in the world, but do not belong to the world. The soul, which is invisible, is kept under guard in the visible body; in the same way, Christians are recognized when they are in the world, but their religion remains unseen.... The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and its members; in the same way, Christians love those who hate them.... The soul, which is immortal, is housed in a mortal dwelling; while Christians are settled among corruptible things, to wait for the incorruptibility that will be theirs in heaven. The soul, when faring badly as to food and drink, grows better; so too Christians, when punished, day by day increase more and more.

*It is to no less a post than this that God has called them,  
and they must not try to evade it.*

— “The Letter to Diognetus” (c. Second Century)

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis-project is a pedagogical question that explores how a local congregation can recover an understanding and practice of community in order not just to *be* a community, but to function as a formative disciple-making communion. The goal of this thesis-project is to affirm that vocational discipleship is primary in the mission of local congregations. This thesis-project recommends practices intended to help local congregations become disciple-making communities that shape and influence how Christians live in the world in response to the call of God, in the pursuit of their vocations and work, and in the exercise of faithful presence. “Faithful presence” is the description of Christian calling recommended by James Davison Hunter in *To Change the World*.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSING THE SITUATION

*“To make a real difference . . . [there would have to be] a reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one’s own advancement.”*

Robert Bellah<sup>1</sup>

How are we to inhabit the world? As humans? As Christians? How are we as God’s people to inhabit a good but fallen creation, to make our home and flourish to the glory of God in a world so deeply broken and gone wrong? To what end has God entrusted us with three score and seven years by birthing us into this troubled *terra firma*? He has placed us here just as surely as he placed our first parents in the Garden. But, *return* to Eden is not an option – the gate to that primeval paradise has been barred. Moreover, the incarnation and resurrection convince us that *resignation* is not an option, even though many Christians have suggested that the world is so polluted that our only option is to withdraw and wait for its destruction. If Christ shows no sign of quitting this world, why should we?<sup>2</sup> Nor have the Church’s efforts at *repair* and *renewal* (in spite of remarkable and significant contributions to science, medicine, government, art, education, etc.) proven that our well-intentioned efforts to fix the broken structures of society have produced permanent transformation.

If not these ends, then what purpose shapes the forward trajectory of our lives as Christians and as the Church? How does that purpose inform the way we “live and move

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<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 287-88.

<sup>2</sup> “Our basic Kuyperian impulse is to look for signs that God has not given up, even in the midst of a fallen world.” Richard Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 20.

and have our being”<sup>3</sup>? How do we come to understand and commit ourselves to that purpose and mission? Since the end of ages has not yet come, we live between the creation and consummation, not merely meandering between the two poles of history, but as people living in the reality of Christ’s resurrection. The kingdom of God has come, has broken through the brokenness of the world as we know it, a reality that should impact everything about how we think of ourselves and make sense of the world. When Christ shook off the bonds of death, when he rose from the ashes of God’s judgment fire, he was plucked from the Tree of Life as the firstfruit<sup>4</sup> of the world made new. By his Spirit, his life has been implanted<sup>5</sup> within us (personally and corporately) so that a second incarnation becomes a living reality with the life of God’s people in the world. We have been joined simultaneously to this world with its need of redemption and to the world to come with God’s promise of *shalom*. Therefore, as God’s people we live with our feet firmly planted in two worlds – a rebellious world hurtling toward judgment and destruction, and a redeemed world that is being prepared for glory and *shalom* by the One who is making all things new.

God is at work through all that he has made so that in Christ, creation will be brought to completion. Even in rebellion, every part of the world he has made serves him,<sup>6</sup> instruments through which he is completing the work that Christ accomplished. By his grace we are now willing and worshiping participants in his work because he has inextricably joined us to

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:28. Paul is quoting the Greek poet Epimenides – he applies the poet’s tribute to a pagan deity to Christ. This quotation appears in the New Life Presbyterian Church logo because in addition to being part of Paul’s remarks to the academy in Athens, it demonstrates our ability with Christ at the center to see truth in the world wherever it appears, and it illustrates our mission to engage culture attentively and speak the gospel truthfully in language the culture understands, an “indigenous coefficient.” Lamen Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 79.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 15:23. All scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2008, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> Jas 1:21; 2 Pet 1:4.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kgs 6:17; Ps 104:4; Isa 44:28; 45:1; Matt 8:27; Rom 8:28.

Christ, who by his Spirit is at work in the world.<sup>7</sup> Our lives, in particular our work, are a participation in his mission of *reconciliation* in Christ.

## IN BUT NOT OF

Understanding our place as God's people in creation and in post-Christian America begins with understanding the in-but-not-of tension that Jesus knew we would experience. Knowing what we would encounter, he prayed for us even as he mapped out our gospel mission.<sup>8</sup> Augustine devoted a prominent part of his intellectual and pastoral energies to this tension, chiefly in *The City of God*, wrestling with the question of how two distinct yet connected cities exist in human and redemptive history. The one city, born from the soil and stuff of this world, the glorious ruin of a spoiled creation; the other city, born by the resurrection power of new life in God. So, as we have been called to life from death, we are called to live in the world, true residents of both cities. We follow in the footsteps of Christ who loves and is forever a part of all he has created and is now redeeming.

Syncretism and capitulation have long been temptations for the covenant people living in history as part of the places and cultures of the world, a siren's call to which the wisest man in all the world succumbed.<sup>9</sup> God warned his people through Moses that they were not to seek a king like all the other nations.<sup>10</sup> The prophets repeated God's summons to a faithfulness that resisted the pull to abandon the distinctives of covenant fidelity. Disciples of the resurrected Lord quickly found their loyalty tested to the limit, many joining their

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 49.

<sup>8</sup> John 17:9ff.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kgs 11:1-6; Ps 20:7.

<sup>10</sup> Deut 17:14ff.

Saviour in death. Two thousand years later, little has changed for many Christians throughout the world whose blood is shed by those who hate the name of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

While no less lethal spiritually and no less aggressive socially, the challenge in the West and in America is far more subtle. Widespread confidence in the ideas of materialism and rationalism has marginalized the integrity and influence of God's people and God's presence by rendering the Church's historic sense of identity and mission inconsistent and even implausible. The individual has supplanted the community; the power of possibility has replaced providence; and personal fulfillment has become a self-focused substitute for worship. Consequently, we as God's people need to refocus our lives by affirming our place in the world, God's mission that unites us, and his call to lives of faithful presence.

This thesis is an attempt to encourage the local congregation I serve, New Life Presbyterian Church (NLPC), to grapple with what it means to inhabit the world both as God's image bearers and as his people living with creational and redemptive purpose. What is our calling, and how can we help one another embrace a more robust understanding of and commitment to that calling? What does it mean to respond to God's calling to lives of faithful presence?

There are two prominent biblical motifs that expand our understanding of the in-but-not-of tension. They form the foundation for much of this discussion of calling and community: *exile* and *shalom*.

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<sup>11</sup> "The world is rarely neutral toward the gospel." Darrell Guder, ed., *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 32.

## Exile

There is no way to dismiss the uncomfortable place God's people occupy for the majority of biblical history: God's people live in exile. They live somewhere other than their true home. They are ejected from the Garden. They live for nearly half a millennia in slavery in Egypt. They are carried off to Babylon. Even when they are living in real estate that should be "home," it is not home because their land has been conquered by a foreign political power. Similarly, after the resurrection of Christ, God's people are scattered to the world, dispersed among the nations, to live as "strangers and aliens."<sup>12</sup> So, too, for Christians today. The world that is our home right now is not the heaven we have been promised. Yet, we live today in the same way as God's people of the Old Covenant who built their houses and raised their families on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean even though the ground beneath their feet and the cities they erected were not their final home.

## Shalom

At the same time, this world has been given to us as our home this side of the consummation, until the end of all things is at hand. It is a material world that resounds to the glory of God with the very heavens declaring his glory,<sup>13</sup> a world in which the rocks will not remain silent if God is not praised.<sup>14</sup> It is the artistry and handiwork of God's creative love, a masterpiece that even when scarred by sin, remains what God declared it to be at the

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<sup>12</sup> Lev 25:23; Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11.

<sup>13</sup> Ps 19:1.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 19:40.



beginning: “good.”<sup>15</sup> But supremely, it is a world to which God in Christ has forever joined himself. In Christ, “the dust of the earth is on the throne of the majesty on high.”<sup>16</sup> Christ is the flesh and blood brother of all who have received his life; and while the elect are part of the heavenly family by adoption, Jesus is part of the whole human family by birth. He will always be more truly part of our race than we will ever be of his.

In this good world, from the beginning, we have been charged to work, create, protect, and nurture the whole of the material world,<sup>17</sup> a charge that does not disappear simply because of sin. Many of the towering figures of the Old Testament live lives intertwined with the conflicted complexities of human culture. Abraham the nomadic king holds court and does business with other nations, Joseph plies his skills for the economic and agricultural well-being of Egypt, Moses benefits from a royal education in Pharaoh’s household, Daniel was a trust-worthy and savvy advisor to the kings of Babylon, and Mordecai and Esther lived as loyal subjects in the court of Xerxes as was Nehemiah to Artaxerxes.

Then it should not surprise us that Yahweh calls his people to a similar way of living in the world, in the thick of culture. He speaks through Jeremiah to his people in exile:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But *seek the welfare of the city* [emphasis added] where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

<sup>16</sup> John “Rabbi” Duncan (no citation), quoted in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 87.

<sup>17</sup> Gen 2:15.

<sup>18</sup> Jer 29:4-7.

Living in exile and seeking *shalom* – God has called us to both. As Denis Haack, editor of *Critique* is fond of saying: “We are called to live faithfully in Babylon.”<sup>19</sup> Or, as James Davison Hunter says in *To Change the World*, we are called to lives of “faithful presence”<sup>20</sup> in the world. But even though creation is shot through with the effects of sin, we must not ignore the reality that this world is filled with the glory and goodness of God. Everything we handle in the world, including ideas, is the stuff of sacred work and holy calling, and we must not pass through this world blind to the way creation wells up with hope and the way it breathes with anticipation of the world made new.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;...  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.<sup>21</sup>

This world is the divinely appointed arena in which “Grace Reigns,”<sup>22</sup> in which the glory of God is made visible, and of which God says with joyful jealousy, “Mine!”<sup>23</sup> This world is the horn we put to our lips to blow the good news,<sup>24</sup> knowing that one day,

The trumpet child will blow his horn  
Will blast the sky till it's reborn<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Denis Haack, “Living in Exile: A Model for Faithfulness,” <http://www.ransomfellowship.org/articledetail.asp?AID=24&B=Denis%20Haack&TID=7> (accessed January 04, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> “At root, a theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God’s faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return....When the Word of all flourishing – defined by the love of Christ – becomes flesh in us, in our relations with others, within the tasks we are given, and within our sphere of influence – absence gives way to presence, and the word we speak to each other and to the world becomes authentic and trustworthy. This is the heart of a theology of presence.” James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 95ff.

<sup>21</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” <http://www.bartleby.com/122/7.html> (accessed January 07, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 375. Mr. Honest’s final words before “he left the World.”

<sup>23</sup> “In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, ‘That is mine!’” Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

<sup>24</sup> Isa 52.

<sup>25</sup> Linford Detweiler and Karin Bergquist, “The Trumpet Child,” *The Trumpet Child*, (Cincinnati, OH: Speckled Dog Records, 2007), <http://overtherhine.com/albums/the-trumpet-child/> (accessed January 04, 2012).

But the question persists: How do we live faithfully in Babylon? How do we inhabit this world with a supreme love for God and a subsequent and simultaneous love for all who bear his image and for all that he has made good?

## THE LOCAL CHALLENGE

After more than sixteen years as senior pastor of NLPC, it is time to think again and more strategically about the dynamics that characterize the congregation I serve and the community in which I serve. People keep leaving. No, these are not departures fueled by disgruntled discontent and church fights. Ithaca is a small community dominated by the largest of the Ivy League schools, Cornell University, and the largest private college in New York, Ithaca College. People leave because the clock has run out on their time here – they graduate to begin careers, the tides of life in the academy carry them away, or they leave to find employment elsewhere when the local job market plays out.

While our turnover is high, it would be pessimistic to say simply that we bleed people, to say that NLPC is nothing more substantial than a sieve. Rather, this congregation serves a distinct disciple-making role in the larger economy of God's work in the world. My fellow elders and I believe that NLPC does not exist to be a temporary baby-sitter for a bunch of restless church-goers. Rather, we are confident that strategic spiritual development happens during the critical incubation period during which women and men, families and singles, young and old are entrusted to our care. We are a sending church – folks from our fellowship leave us to be scattered to the ends of the earth to marry and begin families, to teach in universities world-wide, to labor and manage, to conduct research, to direct corporations, to write and create, to build and design serving the needs of commerce and

culture, government and education, policy and creativity. Those who call Ithaca home work in those vocations typical for our region: technology, engineering, food, agriculture, education, and the arts. But we want to be more intentional about the pastoral work of spiritual formation. How can we as a congregation be a community that shapes how we, as well as those we send out, understand our kingdom mission and enact our calling as Christians?

We believe that central to our mission as a local congregation serving the needs of the church in Ithaca is cultivating and enacting a view of calling that affirms how God has designed us to love and inhabit the world for his glory and the common good. As a congregation, we need to understand and embody this view of calling first if we are to impart it to those who are with us only for a season. So, our need is both specific and urgent – specific in that it relates to the matter of calling, and urgent in that we have a narrow window of time in which to prepare those we will send out. We must learn to be a skilled and focused disciple-making community.

To state it another way, we are interested in growth, but not primarily numeric growth. Adding to our numbers would have both advantages and disadvantages. Quantitative growth suggests a kind of flourishing that is attractive and would increase our resources. But none of the faithful evangelical congregations in our area are very large – we live with a spiritual barrenness typical of regions awaiting transformation by the gospel. Until the Spirit of God brings revival to our region, or unless we rob members from one another (which my fellow pastors and I refuse to tolerate), I think it's likely that our growth will come qualitatively first. But perhaps more significantly, a quality of discipleship is more likely to emerge within a congregation that does not outgrow its capacity to embody a relational environment that fosters a missional view of kingdom calling. We believe very strongly that NLPC should

focus on calling as a foundational principle of Christian discipleship, and that we should mobilize ourselves to that end. Our vision is to equip women and men both to be mature as followers of Christ, as well as to be committed to faithful living – living in a way that is full of faith, fully informed by and a full expression of faith – in every area of life, every dimension of culture, every corner of the world. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

This project seeks to explore how the pastoral leadership of NLPC can better encourage and equip the congregation to understand the mission of God and respond to God's calling to lives of faithful presence.

## THE LARGER CHALLENGE

The challenge we face is not merely situational – a problem specific to NLPC. The dominant secular culture presses back against us particularly in the area of community formation, which is essential to how we learn and live out our calling. Whatever strategic plan of discipleship we adopt must consider those cultural forces that, if left undiagnosed, will undermine our efforts to form the kind of community essential to our mission. “Cultural analysis is necessary because of the interconnection between theology and life.”<sup>26</sup>

How are we as humans to inhabit the world? How are we as Christians to inhabit a fallen world? The answers offered over the millennia range from unbridled hedonism to escapism to naïve optimism to hope-filled realism in pursuit of human flourishing. Who am I? Why am I here? Or, to re-state these famous questions from a more community-oriented perspective: Who are *we*? Why are *we* here? These are fundamental questions we as human beings ask about our existence. They should be among the most fundamental questions we

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 10.

as Christians ask about our life as the body of Christ as well as our calling and mission. We answer these questions not only as *followers of Christ* but also as *humans made in God's image*. The answers from these two perspectives are distinct but not disconnected.

These questions express our universal longing for identity and purpose. From a desire deeply embedded in our bones, we want to know that our lives matter. The answers to these questions reside both in a place and in an idea. Identity and purpose are disclosed in both location and relationship (connection to the world and to people) as well as in an idea that expresses both truth and perspective (foundation and vision).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer poetically posed the first of these questions from prison shortly before his execution in 1945 in Flossenbürg.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I would step from my cell's confinement  
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly  
Like a squire from his country house.  
Who am I? They often tell me  
I used to speak to my warders  
Freely and friendly and clearly,  
As though it were mine to command.  
Who am I? They also tell me  
I bore the day's misfortune  
Equably, smilingly, proudly,  
Like one accustomed to win.  
Am I then really all that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself,  
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,  
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,  
Tossing in expectation of great events,  
Powerlessly trembling for friends at infinite distance,  
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
Faith, and ready to say farewell to it all?  
Who am I? This or the other?  
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
And before myself a contemptibly woe-begone weakling?  
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,  
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine,  
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine!<sup>27</sup>

The context in which Bonhoeffer ponders and offers an answer is crucial to our appreciation of his conclusion. He was in prison, convicted and sentenced to death for his role in the attempted assassination of Hitler. His decision to participate in the plot was complicated by ethical questions and competing loyalties. Was it just? Was it right? Was it responsible for him to risk his responsibilities to his fiancée, to his congregation, to his students? The context is significant for us because if Bonhoeffer is able to offer help with identity and purpose at the most severe, even ambiguous, extremities of life (not unlike the Apostle Paul writing words of joy and hope from his prison cell while facing immanent execution),<sup>28</sup> we have reason to believe that these answers will help us in the rhythms of ordinary life as we wrestle with God's calling to faithful presence.

Who am I? Does my life matter? Bonhoeffer's answer is a quietly confident declaration: I am the Lord's. The logic, then, is ironclad: If I am the Lord's, then my life matters. If who I am matters to God, then I need not look elsewhere for life-grounding dignity and significance.

Bonhoeffer also writes with the awareness that the eyes of others are upon him – his guards, his fellow citizens, and his brothers and sisters in Christ. He writes as part of a larger community and with an awareness that his identity, while grounded in the gospel (in a relationship with God through the person and work of Christ), is expressed in the context of relationships. *Who* he is cannot be divorced from *where* he is.

Most of us are not able to answer these questions well. We do not answer them well, to a significant degree because our answers often arise from a deep disconnection from Christian

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<sup>27</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Who Am I?" in *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 347-8.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Tim 4:6ff.

community and a profound misunderstanding of the gospel's implications for life, most particularly our calling. How can we answer these most foundational questions of identity and purpose if we have a shallow appreciation for the ground upon which the answers need to be founded? Bonhoeffer's words admit to struggles, even doubts, that arise from the anguish of circumstance. Yet we marvel at his poise and his ability to offer any kind of answer. He exposes our own lack of clarity and confidence.

What then are some of the significant factors that contribute to this widespread lack of identity and purpose among Christians? As is always the case in analysis of this sort, there are a multitude of contributing factors.<sup>29</sup> I would like to consider four in an effort to understand better what frustrates our efforts to experience Christian community and to embody a richly biblical practice of calling.

*Transience* and *depersonalization* are broad cultural dynamics not unique to life in the church. Theological *confusion* and *individualism* (more narrowly defined) are patterns more distinct to Christian living. My goal is to identify and apply ideas and practices that contribute to the formation of a community that is effective in shaping the understanding and practice of the calling by God which summons us to a comprehensive engagement in the world. Comprehensive – not just our neighborhoods but also (quoting that animated visionary, Buzz Lightyear), “to infinity, and beyond.”<sup>30</sup> *Soli Deo gloria* – the glory of God – occupying all of life, every component of our beings, every dimension of the universe, every area of culture. We are to be a community, his people devoted to his glory with that all-encompassing vision.

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<sup>29</sup> This study considers broader cultural forces. This is not to ignore the multitude of more specific social forces that impact community formation, forces that include “atomizing technologies” (Karl Johnson, e-mail message to author, May 05, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> *Toy Story*, Directed by John Lasseter. Buena Vista Pictures, 1995, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114709/trivia?tab=qt&ref\\_=tt\\_trv\\_qu](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114709/trivia?tab=qt&ref_=tt_trv_qu) (accessed April 23, 2013).



*Transience* describes our loss of ability or willingness to attach to those elements of culture that provide stability, coherence, and significance.

*Depersonalization* points to ways in which cultural forces have eroded a commonly-held sense of self and significance and have undermined our understanding of what it means to be human.

Christians manifest great *confusion* about the gospel and calling. For many followers of Christ the connection between what makes them Christian (the gospel) and the significance of living our lives as Christians (calling) is fuzzy at best.

In the Church there may be no greater capitulation to the culture at large than in the loss of community. *Individualism* in the life of the Church permeates the way Christians relate to God, to one another, and to the world.

## **Transience**

Many Americans believe that the pace of life is toxic. Most of us try to do too much, have too many responsibilities, and try to juggle too many interests and commitments. We are a nation of multi-taskers. We eat dinner while watching television while emailing while carrying on conversations with people wandering around the room while listening to music while Googling. A generation of incredibly proficient multi-taskers has arrived at a college near you. These are the young people discussed in *Time* in 2006. Bronte (14) explained: "My parents always tell me I can't do homework while listening to music, but they don't understand that it helps me concentrate.... If a friend thinks she's not getting my full

attention, I just make it very clear that she is, even though I'm also listening to music."<sup>31</sup> But the reality is that "almost everyone is terrible at multi-tasking."<sup>32</sup>

I'm not going to unpack all the relational and bio-neurological implications of this kind of compartmentalized living – we just do it (or try to do it). It's part of the learned rhythm and structure of our lives, and it characterizes much of our shared experience in our relationships with other people and the world around us. Life moves fast, too fast for us to be multi-tasking wizards who hold onto any piece of the kaleidoscopic landscape whizzing past us for very long. Heraclitus lived in a static world by comparison.

What celebrity model, Heidi Klum, says of the fashion industry is true for many areas of life, "One day you're in, and the next, you're out." One day she's here, the next day she's gone. One moment your smart phone is cutting edge, and the next day it's a Stone Age relic.

The speed with which new things emerge and change, appear and disappear, all around us has accelerated because of our love of freedom and desire for mobility. Basic physics dictates that we can't "get up and go" and be attached at the same time. Geographic mobility and economic freedom have become more than moral virtues for many – they have become inalienable rights than cannot be denied. When priorities like mobility and autonomy become the insuppressible drive behind our choices, the result is fragmentation – not clean, neat, surgical separations, but tearing, ripping, destructive divorce. There is not only hell to pay, but alimony, too. Frequently, children have "several sets of grandparents and several 'family homes' to choose between – each for 'time renting,' like holiday apartments in fashionable seaside resorts. None of these feels like the true, 'one and only' home."<sup>33</sup> How

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<sup>31</sup> Claudia Wallis, "GenM: The Multitasking Generation," *Time*, March 27, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1174696,00.html> (accessed January 04, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Kevin Loria, "Only 2% Of People Can Actually Multitask," *Business Insider*, May 08, 2014, [www.businessinsider.com/multitasker-test-tells-you-if-you-are-one-of-the-2-2014-5](http://www.businessinsider.com/multitasker-test-tells-you-if-you-are-one-of-the-2-2014-5) (accessed May 09, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 47.

can we have any meaningful sense of home when the qualities of life that define being *at home* are absent or devalued – we change jobs because we follow the money or a carrot driven by ambition, we change marriages because we follow the Tantalus of greater happiness and fulfillment, we change churches because... well, you can fill in that blank easily enough.

Transience, the inability or unwillingness to attach to foundational cultural structures (family, organizations, etc.), produces not only a kind of cultural vagrancy in which everyone is from nowhere, but it also results in a “deepening condition of ‘homelessness’” of a deeper, less geographic variety. Peter Berger observes that the “migratory character of [the inhabitants of the modern era and their] experience of society and of self has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of ‘home.’ It goes without saying that this condition is psychologically hard to bear.”<sup>34</sup> Berger continues:

The ‘homelessness’ of modern social life has found its most devastating expression in the area of religion. The general uncertainty, both cognitive and normative, brought about by the pluralization of everyday life and of biography in modern society, has brought religion into a serious crisis of plausibility. The age-old function of religion – to provide ultimate certainty amid the exigencies of the human condition – has been severely shaken. Because of the religious crisis in modern society, social ‘homelessness’ has become metaphysical – that is, it has become ‘homelessness’ in the cosmos. This is very difficult to bear.... Modernity has accomplished many far-reaching transformations, but it has not fundamentally changed the finitude, fragility, and mortality of the human condition. What it has accomplished is to seriously weaken those definitions of reality that previously made the human condition easier to bear.<sup>35</sup>

Change and the promise of the “new and improved” invites distrust in the present and the past and produces a heightened urgency to live in the ever-evolving now. But when the “new and improved” fails to deliver what it has promised, reorientation collapses into

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Berger, *Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), 82.

<sup>35</sup> Berger, *Homeless Mind*, 184-185.

disorientation and despair. The new believers are set adrift, “lost in the cosmos,” also the apt title by Walker Percy in which he comments:

The peculiar predicament of the present-day self surely came to pass as a consequence of the disappointment of the high expectations of the self as it entered the age of science and technology. Dazzled by the overwhelming credentials of science, the beauty and elegance of the scientific method, the triumph of modern medicine over physical ailments, and the technological transformation of the very world itself, the self finds itself in the end disappointed by the failure of science and technique in those very sectors of life which had been its main source of ordinary satisfaction in past ages.<sup>36</sup>

As a society-at-large we are wanderers, uprooted from the ancient soil. Having abandoned well-worn paths leading from a tested heritage, we keep moving, continually searching, grasping at hints, at illuminated motes of dust, with our fingers never closing on the substance. Where does the homeless mind rest? Where does the cosmic vagabond find the well-worn hook on which to fling her scarf... without looking? Where does the transient soul look for answers: Who am I? Why am I here?

Like many university and military towns, Ithaca experiences relentless turnover. With a struggling local economy outside Cornell University and Ithaca College (a situation aggravated by high taxation), the city has little power to draw and hold residents for the long haul. Consequently, 75% of the people who have been a part of NLPC over the past ten years are now living somewhere else. If we factor in those who are currently part of the worshipping fellowship who will be gone soon, that figure rises to 85%.

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<sup>36</sup> Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York Open Road, 2011), Location 2204, Kindle.

## Depersonalization

Our frenetic transience makes it difficult for our lives to be personal and connected. A personalized life is marked by a poised sense of self and a settled sense of belonging. A depersonalized life by contrast is detached from those sources of identity that enable each person to know his or her own self.

The culture-shaping forces currently at work in our social world make it increasingly rare for anyone to be “a longterm witness to another person’s life.”<sup>37</sup> Most of us see segments of one another’s lives, but rarely the whole. We see snapshots, but not the panorama. Consequently we are being robbed of the opportunity not only to observe, but also to learn what it means to live a whole life, a life lived to the full, a person whose existence has embodied genuine fulfillment...or, not. Moving at the light-speed of self-gratification, we cannot see through our pinhole perspective how a life plays out for better or worse. Many marital commitments do not endure as long as promised, i.e. till “death to us part.” The fragmentation and detachment take their toll on our soul.

In the mirroring and reflection of community, we learn about ourselves. However, what we learn from what we observe currently swirling around us is that the existence we have created for ourselves is deeply impersonal. This detachment does not destroy our longing to find our selves, to know and be known, but it leaves those longings deeply unsatisfied and gives us reasons to wonder if we really matter. “Community ties become increasingly dispensable.... [P]ersonal loyalties decrease their range with the successive weakening of

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character* (New York: Norton, 1998), 20-1, in Bauman, *Community*, 46.

national ties, regional ties, community ties, neighborhood ties, family ties, and finally, ties to a coherent image of one's self."<sup>38</sup>

The net effect that these cultural forces have upon us is a tyrannical pull away from those pillars of identity that enable us to know our selves and our place in the world and to know what it means to be a person. I think it is fair to say that many women and men have been so dismantled that they have lost any confidence of what it means to be human, and are therefore unprepared to answer the question "Why am I here?"

The Christian view of personhood – of identity, self, and purpose – finds its roots in Genesis 1-2. The historic creeds all affirm that God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth is responsible for our existence. Life in general and human life in particular were his idea. Furthermore, God has made humans distinct from other living creatures in two ways. First, humans, male and female, bear his image, an image most clearly seen and most fully understood in the communion of men and women.<sup>39</sup> Second, humans are to inhabit the world as their home through mutual delight, creativity, and stewardship of what has been entrusted to their care. But with the Fall and the corruption of the world by sinful rebellion, the human race plummeted away from the source of self and into alienation from God and an inevitable depersonalized isolation from everything else.

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<sup>38</sup> Maurice Stein, *The Eclipse of Community*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 329, in Bauman, *Community*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Males and females, bringing together the distinctness of their genders in relationship with one another (significantly, but not exclusively in marriage), most fully embody the image of God. The loss of gender identity in complementary male/female relationships obscures the image of God.

## Brokenness

There is no way for anyone who has been born in sin (which is everyone) to know the heights from which we have fallen. The world-as-it-is is all we have known. But we know irrefutably that the world-as-it-is is not the way it is supposed to be. We admit it every time we turn away in disgust and dismay, saying “That’s not right.” We may not know what “right” should be, but we are sure that what we are facing is not it. This thought opens *Mere Christianity* and is C.S. Lewis’s starting point for presenting the ideas foundational to Christianity.<sup>40</sup> As Simon (Danny Glover), says to a would-be mugger at the opening of the 1992 film, *Grand Canyon*, “Man, the world ain’t s’posed to work like this. Maybe you don’t know that, but this ain’t the way it’s s’posed to be. I’m s’posed to be able to do my job without askin’ you if I can.... Everything’s s’posed to be different than what it is here.”<sup>41</sup>

Everyone everywhere has always known that what we are and what we experience in life is not the ideal. If we are honest, we recognize that something good and important has been lost, and it has been lost for a long time, a time past remembering. Our brokenness and the brokenness of the world are evident in everything we touch – minds that forget, bones that fracture, hearts that break, plans that fail. Death, evil, calamity, and injustice are everywhere we look with no remedy in sight. It can be a terrifying and isolating realization to admit our limitations and mortality because each encounter with brokenness threatens to rob us of our dignity and leave us a little bit less than what we were.

Deeper still is the brokenness of the soul as our failures drag us into the isolation of guilt and shame. But the good news is that “understanding our pervasive brokenness is at the

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<sup>40</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Grand Canyon*, Directed by Lawrence Kasdan. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1992, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101969/quotes> (accessed January 04, 2012).

heart of true community formation.”<sup>42</sup> Community forms as the broken are gathered to Christ.<sup>43</sup> Jesus began his earthly ministry announcing that he was the good news for the deeply broken: the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed.<sup>44</sup> If you are straining and struggling, Jesus said, “Come to me and I will give you rest”<sup>45</sup> – in my forgiveness and acceptance you will find your true self if you “lose your life,” if you give your life to me.<sup>46</sup>

## Loneliness

Peter Berger, drawing on the prophetic voice of Don Quixote, describes our modern soul as one “bereft of the consolations of prototypes, *man alone*.”<sup>47</sup>

We are living in an age of isolation, imitating the lament from early in the last century, when life was referred to as the age of anxiety. Ironically, we talk today of how small our world has become, with the shrinking effect of globalization, instant sharing of information, quick technology, workplaces that operate around the globe. Yet these do not necessarily create a sense of belonging. They provide connection, diverse information, an infinite range of opinion. But all this does not create the connection from which we can become grounded and experience the sense of safety that arises from a place where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically a member.<sup>48</sup>

A profound and tragic irony has emerged in our culture. The abundantly accessible and increasingly sophisticated creature comforts promise us happiness and fulfillment, completeness and independence. Yet, pursuing one’s own happiness requires acceptance of a level of loneliness. Independence breeds isolation. We did not “seek out loneliness, but [we] accepted it as the price of . . . autonomy.” So, “despite its deleterious effect on health,

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<sup>42</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered : Growing in Christ Through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 58.

<sup>43</sup> “The formation of the community of faith is God’s strategy for making good news known to the world.” Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Luke 4:18-22.

<sup>45</sup> Matt 11:28.

<sup>46</sup> Matt 16:24-26.

<sup>47</sup> Berger, *Homeless Mind*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 1-2.



loneliness is one of the first things ordinary Americans spend their money achieving.” And we succeed. “We meet fewer people. We gather less. And when we gather, our bonds are less meaningful.”<sup>49</sup>

We have been left alone, Berger believes, to shape our lives following our own intrepid imaginations. Yet this solitary self is being asked to bear the weight and significance of “human dignity and unalienable human rights.”<sup>50</sup> This weight, Berger surmises, will prove too great to bear alone outside the strength of an identity that flourishes in the relationships of community.

The spiral of selfishness spins us further and further away from what we desire most deeply. The yearning to belong and to be known languishes unfulfilled in each generation. But we keep reaching for what fails to satisfy even while it fuels our longing – we are trapped in a relentless seduction. John Milton gives voice to our willingness to trade away not only the goodness of the world but our very identity as humans who bear God’s image:

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice  
to reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.<sup>51</sup>

The culture that has championed the pursuit of self-fulfillment has failed to heal those broken relationships that have left us alone, alienated, and dehumanized.

The preeminent source of pain in this culture is broken relationship. The only war many people experience firsthand is the war going on inside their homes and within themselves. This is the war that rages between husband and wife, parents and children, and soul and spirit. This is where we feel the spiritual famine, the emotional drought, and the physical drain. It is in our friendships, our marriages, our families, and in our very selves that we feel this leanness of soul – this humiliation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen Marche, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?” *The Atlantic*, May 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/> (accessed April 19, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Berger, *Homeless Mind*, 88.

<sup>51</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* l.161-163.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas Webster, *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us Through Relationships* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 15.

Since we will not turn back on our own, Christ humbles himself by coming to us so that by his gracious forgiveness and acceptance, he heals our alienation by reconciling us to God and by placing us in a new community, the family of God.<sup>53</sup> His parting words echo in our ears to assure us that in his embrace we will never be lonely again: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”<sup>54</sup>

### Commodification

The self in modern American culture is battered with brokenness and isolated by fragmentation. All that remains for such depersonalized lives is to be sold for scrap. Desperately driven by need, we turn our “materials” into “commodities in order to satisfy human want.”<sup>55</sup> We really are “living in a material world,” but it’s not just Madonna who is “a material girl.”<sup>56</sup> It is a commodified world, in which we have learned to barter, trade, and sell anything we can control to get what we want. We live in “a world in which everything is up for sale – in actual fact, not just in theory.”<sup>57</sup>

It sounds crass, but life usually moves too fast for us to realize that we are “consumed with ourselves.”<sup>58</sup> “Consumer life favors lightness and speed; also the novelty and variety that lightness and speed are hoped to foster and expedite. It is the turnover, not the volume of purchases, that measures success in the life of *homo consumens*.”<sup>59</sup> The self detached from

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<sup>53</sup> Phil 2:5-8.

<sup>54</sup> Matt 28:20.

<sup>55</sup> Graham Ward, “The Commodification of Religion,” *The Hedgehog Review* 5, no. 2 (2003): 55, <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/Commodification/5.2FWard.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Madonna, “Material Girl,” *Like a Virgin* (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Records, 1984), <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/madonna/materialgirl.html> (accessed April 28, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who Are We? Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 63.

<sup>58</sup> Elshtain, *Who Are We?*, 71.

<sup>59</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), 49.

anything outside itself can focus only on caring for itself, leaving “each person to work out his or her own self-definition in relative isolation from others.”<sup>60</sup> It is no longer “Who am I” but “Who do I want to be today?” Many Americans today live with a tremendous sense of empowerment. We view the choices that we are able to make as a validation of self and a confirmation of fulfillment. Thus the commodities we control become fused with our identity – we believe in what we own and control. “Consumers can feel liberated, seeing their consumption choices as facilitating an expressive self and the articulation of personal style without the constraints of tradition or convention.”<sup>61</sup>

The world and the artifacts of culture, including people, become means to an end. The end is personal satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness. Our choices become directed by desire, what we want, what we believe is best for us, and in our best interest. On the surface, such talk has the sound of stewardship – we can even use this language in the church when talking about calling: Be a good steward of what has been entrusted to you, and honor God by *developing yourself to your full potential*.

But in reality, “nothing is holy, sacred, or off-limits in a world in which everything is for sale.”<sup>62</sup> In a commodified culture with a commodified view of self, children can be the greatest casualties. Children themselves become purchases and investments. Care for the elderly, the disabled, and the unwanted is measured by the quality of life we are willing to assign to them and then purchase for them. So, too, with sex and marriage – they are products to be sampled, tested, and enjoyed for as long as they bring the desired return on investment.

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph Davis, “The Commodification of Self,” *The Hedgehog Review* 5, no. 2 (2003): 44, <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/Commodification/5.2EDavis.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Davis, “The Commodification of Self,” 46.

<sup>62</sup> Elshtain, *Who Are We?*, 47.

When guided by wish (“your eyes meet across a crowded room”), partnership follows the pattern of shopping and calls for nothing more than the skills of an average, moderately experienced consumer. Like other consumer goods, partnership is for consumption on-the-spot (it does not require additional training or prolonged preparation) and for one-off use “without prejudice.” First and foremost, it is eminently disposable.

If found faulty or not “fully satisfactory,” goods may be exchanged for other, hopefully more satisfying commodities, even if an after-sales service is not offered and a money-back guarantee not included in the transaction. But even if they deliver on their promise, they are not expected to be in use for long; after all, perfectly usable, shipshape cars, or computers, or mobile telephones in quite decent working condition are consigned to the rubbish heap with little or no regret the moment their “new and improved versions” appear in the shops and become the talk of the town. Any reason why partnerships should be an exception to the rule?<sup>63</sup>

As humans we want to be known. We want to belong. We also desire to be valued. All of these can happen only in relationships found in sustained community. As followers of Christ we agree that we should value and honor one another, but we also long to know that we matter to God. We have a deep yearning to know that we are not worthless specks of dust adrift in the universe. We are able to respect one another as men and women who bear the image of God. But on what basis can we say that we matter to God? When a classic work of art goes up for auction, someone may ask, “What is it worth?” It is worth what someone is willing to pay for it. So, too, we may say of how God values us.

Consider how God expresses the worth of his people through Isaiah:

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, 12-13.

<sup>64</sup> Is 43:1-4.

Yahweh says that his people are worth more than many other nations. But he does not stop there. Jesus says, “The Son of Man came...to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>65</sup> How does one put a price on Jesus, on God himself? But Jesus has said by laying down his life, the Father values his children as much as he does our Elder Brother. We are of incalculable worth to him, and looking to the cross, we may live with the confidence that we matter to God.

Ithaca embodies a well-learned and deeply-ingrained secularism that challenges the kind of community formation that we desire to realize in the church. This secularism comes in part from the influence of the academy. Cornell University’s enlightenment commitments from its founding in 1865 have become deeply embedded in the DNA of Ithaca and have added momentum to Ithaca’s becoming post-Christian. So the city and the church live with a deeply divided view of human identity and the human condition. While we must guard against being unnecessarily adversarial, we must also recognize that the city and the church offer profoundly different answers to the questions, Who am I? and Why are we here?

But the church’s relationship to the city is more complex. The community regularly models an energetic sense of stewardship of natural resources, often with strongly spiritualized and, therefore, personal overtones. Many in the community exemplify a sacrificial and self-disciplined ethic that often resonates with Christian principles of creational stewardship and work. Both within the academy and the residential community, there is an urgency to contribute to problems, to relieve the suffering of others, to help, and to use intellectual, creative, and material resources to solve the problems of the world. And the community is quite eager to be known as a loving community – many of my neighbors are generous and considerate of others. This spirit of sacrifice and service allows us as

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<sup>65</sup> Matt 20:28.

Christians to work with the city to advance the city as well as address community and global needs.

What's lacking in the city's expression of love is an understanding of or hope for how the deep brokenness of life can be healed. What is missing in a typical Ithacan's view of work is a confident identity that is not dependent upon what they produce or how well they perform. In fact the academy can be cruel and competitive – some students whose work is not affirmed are crushed to the point of despair. Their ideas and their work are their identity, and when those are not affirmed, the sense of emptiness and uselessness can be devastating. Many Ithacans express a committed determination to fix the world, to solve the problems of the world, but its vision of what the world should and could be is no greater than the imagination of human potential, a sometimes petty vision silly in its narrowness or naively grandiose in its unfounded optimism. So, the Christian community has to overcome the infiltration of a depersonalizing cultural mindset in order to affirm a solid biblical and creational ground of human identity; that is, to affirm what it means to be men and women who bear the image of God.

### **Confusion**

Even the most casual observer of the current malaise of the Christian church recognizes the debilitating effects of biblical and theological illiteracy. Ignorance of what the Bible teaches undermines not only theology proper (knowing who God is) and piety (living for God's honor and glory), but also leaves Christians adrift in a quandary about the gospel (what is salvation?) and calling (what is the purpose of life?). Adding to the confusion is the deeply divided and uncertain appreciation for the role of community, specifically the

community of the church, which establishes the relational context in which we know, believe, and live.

The root of the trouble is not merely pedagogy, the lack of basic instruction, and the rarity of skilled teaching. To be sure, unfamiliarity with biblical content and concepts makes the ground beneath our feet uncertain so that we reach for other truths that offer the kind of stability we desire. Our hearts cannot tolerate a vacuum when it comes to the essential questions of life – we will believe and hold onto something or anything as the ground of ultimate truth and reality. But the troublesome roots go deeper than pedagogy to epistemology – how do we know that the truths we are offered are really true?

Since the French Revolution, truth has been the proverbial frog in the kettle slowly warming in the water of doubt and uncertainty. “Critical reason had been awakened, launching an inquiry into the ground of all authority. Naïve, simple, childlike faith has all but vanished.”<sup>66</sup> Taking his cue from the opening question of the Heidelberg Catechism,<sup>67</sup> Herman Bavinck, the magisterial Dutch theologian, explains why this disappearance of faith is such an enormous loss:

In order to live comforted and die happily, we need certainty about the invisible and eternal things above. We must know what we are and where we are going. We must know that our personhood is more than a ripple in the ocean, that the moral battle stands far above the natural order, and that the highest and purest ideals of the soul are not illusions but reality. We must know how we can be liberated from the accusations of our conscience and from the weight of sin. We must know that God *is* and that He is *our* God. We must be sure we are reconciled to Him and can therefore

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<sup>66</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 1980), 8.

<sup>67</sup> “Lord’s Day 1 Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death? A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.” *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1988), 13.

approach death and judgment without terror. In all this, our greatest need is for certainty. It is the deepest, although often unconscious, need of the human soul.<sup>68</sup>

The confusion that exists in the life of many Christians today is a consequence not only of an absence of knowledge, but also of a loss of confidence. Actually, not a loss of confidence, *per se*, but a loss of confidence in divine authority and revelation. Ironically, while there may be a loss of certainty that what the Bible actually teaches is worth believing to the bitter end,<sup>69</sup> there seems to be little loss of certainty in self. In fact, we often muster a bravado of certainty that masks the absence of an inner solidness that comes from belonging to something greater than ourselves. But as a culture we show no lack for confidence in voicing what we are convinced is true. G.K. Chesterton describes this modern hubris (T.S. Eliot's era of "The Hollow Men"):

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert – himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt – the Divine Reason. . . . Every day one comes across somebody who says that of course his view may not be the right one. Of course his view must be the right one, or it is not his view. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.<sup>70</sup>

What, then, is the basis of certainty in the realm of faith and ethics? Scientific knowledge spreads before us data that leads to sensible conclusions enabling us to say with confidence, "This is true." So basic is this process in the information age that it is commonly held that "anyone who isn't convinced by scientific proof casts doubt on his sanity."<sup>71</sup> But, not so with certainty in the realm of faith. In this area of knowledge, we rely on testimony, a trusted

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<sup>68</sup> Locating certainty in God, Bavinck denies the impossibility of certainty and corrects misplaced certainty. Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 22. Bavinck argues that "apologetics is the fruit, never the root, of faith." The reasonableness of the faith is a comfort and reassurance to those who believe, but faith is never held with certainty and confidence solely because our questions have been answered and our doubts have been quieted.

<sup>70</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1957), 31-32.

<sup>71</sup> Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 24.



word. Certainty “always rests on revelation, authority, a divine word, whether true or presumed, and is therefore always only a fruit of faith, a faith that – for whatever reason – recognizes this authority and bows before it in obedience.”<sup>72</sup> Certainty with respect to faith comes with our reception of a trusted word, a trust placed in the one whom we believe has spoken the truth. That truth is then accepted with humility, simplicity, and childlikeness.<sup>73</sup> If the source is infallible, no one would doubt the reasonableness of a confidence placed in that testimony.

However, the assault upon the trustworthiness of the truth spoken by God in his Word has changed little since the beginning of history. Satan insinuated to Eve, “Did God really say...?”<sup>74</sup> That question has echoed through every generation since the Fall, even to this very moment in history. “Is God’s Word really God’s Word?” If it is, the two-fold response must be both submission and certainty – how can I not bend the arc of my life to his Word, and how can I not be confident that all he has spoken is true? However, if God’s Word is not really God’s Word, then the certainty of my faith, the foundation of my life and identity, will be no more sure than the reliability and trust-worthiness of the authority I substitute for God.

The leading contender for a substitute for the authority of biblical revelation is existential rationalism. The explosion of knowledge and human accomplishment over the past one hundred fifty years has amassed a mountain of evidence of human potential. What problem can we not solve with enough research and hard work? What disease can we not conquer? What question can we not answer? There is in our age a spirit of invincibility that has had a profound effect on how we experience certainty with respect to faith. Describing the

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<sup>72</sup> Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 24.

<sup>73</sup> Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Gen 3:1.

evolution of certainty emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century, Bavinck describes the adaptation this way:

Religion became a matter of reason, the truth regarding eternal things was now dependent on historical proofs and rational argument, and the certainty of faith became confused with rational insight. On the other hand, within the small circles of the faithful it evoked another reaction: they were not satisfied with merely rational knowledge but sought the essence of salvation in experience. This movement gradually devolved into pietism.... Accordingly, the believer was prompted to turn inward in order to assure himself about the reality of his own faith.... Arguing against the cold orthodoxy of their time, they said that knowing is not enough: real faith is experience.<sup>75</sup>

Therein lies the malaise of confusion in the church. Biblical illiteracy, our void of Bible knowledge, means we do not know God. If we do not know him; there is no reason for us to trust him; and if we do not trust him, there is no way for us to have any confidence that we understand God's answers to the deep questions of our hearts and to the brokenness of the world: Who are we? Why are we here? Having abandoned the *source* of confidence he has offered us through his Word, sealed to our hearts by the ministry of his Spirit, we place our confidence elsewhere... and then wonder why we are afraid of the dark, and death, and disease, and things that go bump in the night.

But it seems crucial to add (especially in the context of this project) that confidence in God's Word resides within the community of God's people. Each follower of Christ is accountable for her own actions and beliefs, but the actions of believing and obedience belong and flourish in relationship to the communion of grace, the community to which has been entrusted the means of grace (including God's Word). Belief is confirmed and strengthened and maturity is nurtured as the heritage of shared truth and the witness of transformed lives give us courage to press on with hope in what God will complete in us, among us, and for the world.

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<sup>75</sup> Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, 41-42.

## Individualism

In the 1830's, while visiting the United States still in its experimental infancy, Alexis de Tocqueville saw the founding Colonial communities bursting at the seams and giving birth to the Modern Era. The population was flocking to the frontier borne by the spirit of "Manifest Destiny," the lure of gold, and the promise of land, prosperity, and independence. West of the Mississippi, the country was keeping a fragile connection to the old structures and societies in the east with little more than circuit riders and telegraph wires. But, soon track would be laid for the Transcontinental Railroad accelerating westward expansion. Also, the stage was being set for the young country's bloody struggle for identity. Would we be a nation united or divided – would we be the many or the one?

The church was not exempt from this transition and upheaval. Western democracy was on the rise – more reckless (with a deadly passion) in France, more restrained (with a principled enthusiasm) in America – influencing political and social structures including the church. Democratic ideals, at work in the general fabric of society and tied to enormous political privilege and liberty, paved the way for individualism to emerge in the attitudes and organization of common culture. Tocqueville concluded that individualism will lead "a man to connect everything with himself and to prefer himself to everything in the world.... [It] disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself."<sup>76</sup> The Frenchman issued a sober warning: "Individualism, at first, only saps the virtues of public life; but in the long run it

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<sup>76</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics*, eds. Olivier Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (Malden, MD: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 176.

attacks and destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright egoism.”<sup>77</sup> His assessment was that the Americans were for the moment using their freedoms to restrain the impulse of individualism. It was then a struggle that would require unending vigilance – the right use of freedoms and liberty to keep those very freedoms from destroying liberty itself. However, Tocqueville believed that the long-term means by which equality and liberty could be preserved would be a proportionate and intentional development of and a sustained commitment to associations to which individuals belonged and through which they participated as members.<sup>78</sup> He spoke with extraordinary foresight.

Tocqueville makes the deeply ironic observation that the cultural structures (family, church, education) that enabled and empowered the entrepreneurial vision at the birth of the Modern Era were making possible a way of life that, in the end, would prove destructive to the foundation that made that new way of life possible. To this Robert Bellah adds that the rise of individualism began to erode even “the very meanings that give content and substance to the idea of individual dignity.”<sup>79</sup> The American Civil War would soon demonstrate how difficult it would be to answer the question: Are we a thousand points of light,<sup>80</sup> or are we a single constellation?

The explosive transformation and dramatic displacement of American society fueled by democratic idealism defied expectation or explanation causing many in the church to resort to apocalypse to make sense of it all,<sup>81</sup> thus producing a profound change in the way many people viewed the world and their place in it. There was not only a change in perspective, but also a change in leadership and authority. Evangelical urgency coupled with the political

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<sup>77</sup> de Tocqueville, *The Tocqueville Reader*, 176.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick J. Deneen, “Lonesome No More!: Individualism and the Rise of Democratic Despotism,” *The Hedgehog Review* 4, no. 171 (2002): 57-73.

<sup>79</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 144.

<sup>80</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Magician’s Nephew*. (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1955), 88.

<sup>81</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 6.

fervor of populist sovereignty influenced defining components of life within the church – principally, who spoke for God, and on what authority. In many ways, what unfolded in the second half of the nineteenth century was a natural continuation of the seismic shift that occurred in the Reformation, which championed (with biblical justification) the role and responsibility of individuals living before the face of God, a divine right for individuals now given political approval and license. However, some unlikely and unexpected moths were beginning to eat away at the fabric of the church as a community. Christianity was “being effectively reshaped by common people who molded it in their own image.”<sup>82</sup>

Nathan Hatch elaborates:

The passion for equality during these years equaled the passionate rejection of the past. Rather than looking backward and clinging to an older moral economy, insurgent religious leaders espoused convictions that were essentially modern and individualistic. These convictions defied elite privilege and vested interests and anticipated a millennial dawn of equality and justice. Yet to achieve these visions of the common good, they favored means inseparable from the individual’s pursuit of spiritual and temporal well-being.<sup>83</sup>

The spirit of political egalitarianism was beginning to shape how leadership and authority were recognized in the operation of and deliberations within the church. It was becoming common for ministers to serve without having earned formal ministerial credentialing either through education or associational certification. Similarly, it was becoming common for individual Christians to appeal to their own sense of what the Bible meant without seeking confirmation from spiritual leaders or established authority. The only credentials needed for anyone to teach the Bible, according to Lorenzo Dow in his essay *On Church Government*, were “divined evidence in the soul and the effectiveness and power of demonstrated

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<sup>82</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 14.

preaching.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, anyone could preach who was sincere and effective, and anyone who preached with the conviction of a divine inner call should be heard.

People were “doing theology for themselves.”<sup>85</sup> Tocqueville observed “the American insistence that one always rely on one’s own judgment, rather than on received authority, in forming one’s opinions and that one stand by one’s own opinions,”<sup>86</sup> an insistence that seized upon the “opportunity to build a new society unencumbered by feudal inhibitions.”<sup>87</sup> The Old School movement led by the likes of Charles Hodge of Princeton struggled to reunite New School adherents (typified by Charles Finney) to a confessional heritage. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, many Christians had embraced a new confession, “No creed but the Bible,” and were thus unprepared and poorly equipped for the influence of the sophisticated German Higher Criticism, which began systematically to undermine confidence in the historicity, trustworthiness, and authority of not only that new creed, but also the Bible along with the old confessions.

Christopher Lasch mourns that, in the culture at large, we are “fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future.”<sup>88</sup> That connection is certainly lost for the many youth and young adults today who identify themselves as the “so-whats?” who simply “shrug off God, religion, heaven or the ever-trendy search-for-meaning and/or purpose.”<sup>89</sup> As David Kinneman (president of The Barna Group) documents in *unChristian* and *You Lost Me*, an alarming number of youth and young adults simply place no value on being attached to the

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<sup>84</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 147.

<sup>87</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc, 1978), 10.

<sup>88</sup> Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Cathy Grossman, “For Many, ‘Losing My Religion’ Isn’t Just a Song: It’s Life,” *USA Today*, January 03, 2012, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2011-12-25/religion-god-atheism-so-what/52195274/1> (accessed January 10, 2012).

historical beliefs or the social structures of Christianity and the church. It would appear that for these, the separation inaugurated by nineteenth century individualism is complete. Data gathered in a 2011 Baylor University religion survey indicate that 19% of those interviewed believe “it’s useless to search for meaning” – 18% of those interviewed in a 2011 LifeWay research survey responded in the same way.<sup>90</sup> This is the “new individualism” described by Zygmunt Bauman as “the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity.”<sup>91</sup>

Individualism continues to be a powerful re-ordering force in our lives, an enslaving idolatry of self.

The individualism we regret is so deeply ingrained in our traditions that we also take pride in it. Individualism guarantees us our freedom to achieve, and we cherish it because it helps us distinguish ourselves from the crowd, to set ourselves apart, and to stake out a small corner of the world for ourselves. It is an appealing ideology in a society that encourages individuals to break ties so readily with their families, workplaces, and communities.<sup>92</sup>

Undoing generations of patterns that have shifted confidence and identity from membership in the larger community to self-determination and self-affirmation will in all foreseeable probability take a long time to reverse by God’s grace. But these are the cross currents we face as the church in our efforts to answer in our current time and place the ancient questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Why are we here?

In addition to the broad cultural currents flowing from sea to shining sea, there are the specific eddies and whirlpools that mark the currents in Ithaca. The individualistic impulse, what Peter Berger describes as “discontents,” that drew many away from the old structures of family and church, has formed new alliances that are deeply secular.

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<sup>90</sup> Grossman, “For Many, ‘Losing My Religion’ Isn’t Just a Song: It’s Life,” <http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2011-12-25/religion-god-atheism-so-what/52195274/1> (accessed January 10, 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Unertainty* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America’s Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 68.

Modern society's 'solution' to these discontents has been...the creation of the private sphere as a distinctive and largely segregated sector of social life, along with the dichotomization of the individual's societal involvements between the private and the public spheres. The private sphere has served as a kind of balancing mechanism providing meanings and meaningful activities to compensate for the discontents brought about by the large structures of modern society....A limited number of highly significant relationships, most of them chosen voluntarily by the individual, provide the emotional resources for coping with the multi-relational 'outside.' Even religion has become largely privatized, with its plausibility structure shifting from society as a whole to much smaller groups of confirmatory individuals.<sup>93</sup>

Individualism has not destroyed our desire or need for community, but it has effectively convinced us that society is a network more than a structure. "It is perceived and treated as a matrix of random connections and disconnections and of an essentially infinite volume of possible permutations."<sup>94</sup> Even in the church we have replaced the huddled masses of the world yearning to be free with a "community of similarity." The French sociologist, Robert Castel,

charges modern individualism with the responsibility for such a state of affairs; he suggests that modern society, having replaced the closely knit communities and corporations which once defined the rules of protection and monitored their application with the individual duty of self-interest, self-care, and self-help, has been living on the quicksand of contingency. In such a society, the sentiments of existential insecurity and scattered fears of diffuse dangers are, inevitably, endemic....

The 'we' feeling, which expresses a desire to be similar, is a way for men and women to avoid the necessity of looking deeper into each other.... Feeling common bonds without common experience occurs in the first place because men are afraid of participation, afraid of the dangers and the challenges of it, afraid of its pain.

The drive towards a "community of similarity" is a sign of withdrawal not just from the otherness outside, but also from commitment to the lively yet turbulent, invigorating yet cumbersome interaction inside.<sup>95</sup>

Many of these confederations are deeply creational in character focusing on care of the earth, the quest for peace, stewardship, and sustainability, but the world being cared for is absent a god that is transcendent, personal, purposeful, sovereign, or present. All things in

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<sup>93</sup> Berger, *Homeless Mind*, 185-186.

<sup>94</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 57, 87.



this scheme are from *us*, and through *us*, and to *us* (or perhaps, more truthfully, from *me*, and through *me*, and to *me*). It is a quest encouraged by the best of education and the finest intellectual firepower the world has to offer with great vision and noble ambition – the people who come to Ithaca really do want to change the world, and they are prepared to devote their lives to that end. It is, whether they admit it or not, a deeply religious quest that thrives on predominantly secular answers to the great questions. A secular salvation is being offered with a call to righteousness and a promise of forgiveness and acceptance through commitment and sacrifice to sacred causes. Yet at the same time, many of the hopes and dreams of our city are close to the heart of Christians who love the world and pray for its peace.

## CONCLUSION

Ithaca has much in common with the rest of American culture – lives are transient and identities are depersonalized. We are awash in biblical confusion (within and without the church), and we are champions of autonomy and individualism (except when we demand allegiance to our special interests). Therefore, if we are to resist getting sucked into these strong currents, we have to rethink our understanding of why we are here, why God has in fact placed us here in these “enlightened hills.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jay Walljasper and Jon Spayde, "America's 10 Most Enlightened Towns (and we don't mean Santa Fe): Ithaca, New York: Our Kind of Town," *UTNE Reader*, May/June 1997, <http://www.utne.com/Politics/Americas-Most-Enlightened-Towns-Ithaca-New-York.aspx> (accessed January 10, 2012). The *UTNE Reader* named Ithaca the “most enlightened city in America” – take that, Portland and Burlington.

Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* describes his hope for curbing the cultural and social erosion I have been describing. He does more than hint at the reason we as local congregations of Christians should be seeking the welfare of the city in such a time as this.

Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America....Faith-based communities remain such a critical reservoir of social capital in America that it is hard to see how we could redress the erosion of the last several decades without a major religious contribution.<sup>97</sup>

In helping the congregation of NLPC embrace a fresh understanding of our calling as a Christian community, I hope to rekindle some of John Winthrop's vision as stated in his "Model of Christian Charity": "We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice [sic] together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body."<sup>98</sup> To which I would add, always having before our eye a vision of God's calling to live our lives to the full – rich in faith, hope, and love.

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<sup>97</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 66, 408-09.

<sup>98</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 28.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### A THEOLOGY OF CALLING

*Everybody has a calling, don't they? Some have a high calling, some have a low calling.  
Everybody is called but few are chosen. There is a lot of distraction for people,  
so you might not never find the real you. A lot of people don't.*  
Bob Dylan<sup>1</sup>

For every thoughtful and earnest follower of Christ, there is hardly a more basic and urgent question than: What does God want me to do with my life? Or, as we frequently pose the question: What is God's will for my life? Or what is my calling? The casual or weekend Christian hardly gives a thought to divine purpose or spiritual responsibility. But, for the dedicated disciple whose loyalty belongs to the king of heaven and whose heart beats for the lover of her soul, the investment of our lives is stewardship and worship offered to the service of another. Any conversation about these questions quickly begins wrestling with ideas closely related to calling: work, vocation, employment, purpose, and mission. What do all these words mean? In what ways are they similar or distinct? How do they inform what we are supposed to do with our lives?

At one level, this is no easy task. "Work is so close to us that nothing seems easier than to grasp what it is, yet our conceptual nets never quite manage to catch it..." the difficulty

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<sup>1</sup> Mikal Gilmore, "Bob Dylan Unleashed," *Rolling Stone*, September 27, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/bob-dylan-unleashed-a-wild-ride-on-his-new-lp-and-striking-back-at-critics-20120927> (accessed November 29, 2012).

being, “certainly, in its ordinariness.”<sup>2</sup> As Gary Badcock reminds us, “The fundamental sphere of Christian community...will always be in ordinary life in the secular world.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, we often struggle to find significance in the mundane routine of life, or we yearn to break free and find significance far beyond the clutches of the ordinary. Work matters.

And we struggle with the expectations associated with work, particularly our vocations (be it parenting, painting, or plumbing). The blessing of education and economic stability bring many people the confusion of choice: What is the best or correct path to take? Yet many more, who have few choices, despair of finding dignity and purpose in the demands of life that have been pressed upon them: How do I find hope and joy in a job I do not love? Work is personal.<sup>4</sup>

John Stott defines this life’s work that presses in upon us and stretches out before us as “the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.”<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller adds, “Work is taking the raw material of creation and developing it for the sake of others.”<sup>6</sup> James Fowler invites us to understand our life’s vocation as

the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership...a response [that] involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life, and of the

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<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Badcock, *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 120.

<sup>4</sup> “[Work] is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being.” John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, 18-19, [www.catholic-pages.com/documents/laborem\\_exercens.pdf](http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/laborem_exercens.pdf), accessed May 30, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (Basingstoke, U.K.: Marshalls, 1984), 162.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Keller, “Vocation: Discerning Your Calling,” New York: Redeemer City to City, nd., <http://www.coindy.org/wp-content/uploads/Vocation-DiscerningYourCalling.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2013).

resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God's purpose in the service of God and the neighbor.<sup>7</sup>

However, perhaps stated most succinctly, life for the Christian is summarized by the haunting and humbling words of Jesus in the garden on the night before his death: "Not my will, but may your will be done."<sup>8</sup>

A lifetime of contemplation on the Passion of our Lord will not begin to reveal all that Jesus' submission to the will of the Father required of him. But, the more we know, the more we shudder and shield our eyes, and the more we know, the more we wonder what will be required of us when we take up his cross to follow him. This life we have been called to live most certainly does not place self at the center. In fact, we must not deny or take lightly the possible terror that comes when we respond to God's call and say, "Here I am."<sup>9</sup>

Bonhoeffer understood the teaching of Jesus<sup>10</sup> when he wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."<sup>11</sup> In Luther's words,

A man is to live, speak, act, hear, suffer and die for the good of his wife and child, the wife for the husband, the children for the parents, the servants for their masters, the masters for their servants, the government for its subjects, the subjects for the government, each one for his fellowman, even for his enemies, so that one is the other's hand, mouth, eye, foot, even heart and minds.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, we dare not turn away for, as Bunyan's Christian sings through tears at the foot of the cross, "Here is the beginning of my bliss."<sup>13</sup> No less now than in Gethsemane, Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 22:42.

<sup>9</sup> Abraham (Gen 22:1), Jacob (Gen 31:11), Moses (Exod 3:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:4-18), Isaiah (Isa 6:8), God's people (Isa 58:9), Ananias (Acts 9:10).

<sup>10</sup> Matt 10:34-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:27; John 12:24-26.

<sup>11</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition.

<sup>13</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 36

embraces the will of the Father with joy.<sup>14</sup> So, too, may we. The call of God is a simultaneous summons to crucifixion and to resurrection.

To understand the call of God upon our lives, we begin by considering the one who calls – the person and work of the triune God in creation and redemption. Since God has made women and men in his image, we find completion and significance as human beings when the trajectory of our lives follows his. Calling is the summons to do God’s work after him and in the greatest degree possible (given our fallen and finite limitations) to do the work of creation and redemption in the same way he does. “The deepest meaning of human work lies in [our] cooperation...with God,”<sup>15</sup> and “the call of God is to share in his own mission in the world,”<sup>16</sup> “a program as broad as the universe and as deep as life.”<sup>17</sup>

*Work* is that wide creational area of human activity in which we creatively and purposefully invest in relationships and all the stuff of life. It is what God made us to do as image bearers who inhabit this world.<sup>18</sup> Some of work in this broad sense is of our own choosing (jobs, education, friendships, marriage, service, recreation) and much is responsibility pressed upon us (families, health, provision, citizenship, crisis). *Vocation* is the particular and personal expression we give to the work that we do. Often regarded as our career path, the vocational trajectory of our lives gives expression to our sense of giftedness and identity as men and women. “To a large extent we *are* what we do.”<sup>19</sup> *Calling* is God’s

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<sup>14</sup> Heb 12:2

<sup>15</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 98.

<sup>16</sup> John Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Smedes, *All Things Made New: A Theology of Man’s Union With Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 127.

<sup>18</sup> “Through work man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family. And work means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself.” John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 26.

engagement of us in work both as image bearers and as members of his family. Calling is what makes our work a response to God and his will and what summons us to live faithfully in every area of life. Finally, *mission* is God's purpose in creation and redemption. Our work, vocation, and calling all join us to participate in what God is accomplishing in history and how he is bringing his creation to completion.<sup>20</sup>

To get at a better understanding of how to recognize and practice calling (the focus of this study), and distinguish it from work, vocation, and mission, consider four movements of calling. We are first called to God. Then, we are called to work, into the world, and finally to a way of life.

### **Called to God**

Calling since the Fall begins with the summons of redemption. God calls us to himself by his decree of reconciliation. Each one of us has been born into this life in sin. That is, we arrive in this world not only in need for forgiveness to resolve our guilt but also in need of acceptance to heal our alienation. Sin has banished us from the presence and familial community of God, but in the grace of salvation God both comes to us himself<sup>21</sup> and calls us to himself.<sup>22</sup> “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ....You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “The church has no ministry of its own; its ministry is Christ’s.” Badcock, *The Way of Life*, 96.

<sup>21</sup> John 1:14 - the word became flesh and dwelt among us; Matt 1:23 – Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. What Jesus says to Zacchaeus, he does in the entire work of redemption, “I must stay at your house today”; cf. Luke 19:5.

<sup>22</sup> Isa 55:1; Matt 11:28; John 7:37.

<sup>23</sup> Eph 2:13, 19; cf. Hos 1:10; 2:23; Rom 9:25; 1 Pet 2:10.

The Apostle Paul concludes his theological foundation in the book of Romans with this magisterial summary: “All things are from him, and through him, and to him.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the great cycle of redemptive history is God, having birthed us into the world as his creatures, calling us back to himself as his children. This means that

our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia). Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think speak, live, and act entirely for him.<sup>25</sup>

Now, our challenge, in wrestling with our life choices and priorities, is to hold these two dimensions of calling together, and ensure that they are kept in the right order.<sup>26</sup>

## Relationship

Before we think of calling as activity, tasks, vocation, or responsibility, we need to recognize that calling begins with relationship. This is no relationship that we have merely stumbled upon or invented, but this is a relationship established by the omnipotent decree of the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. Having been called to God in Christ<sup>27</sup> and united to Christ by his Spirit,<sup>28</sup> we can no longer explain who we are or why we are here apart from Christ’s identity and work.<sup>29</sup> So, this relationship that God establishes produces the most profound and dramatic reorientation imaginable in our lives.

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<sup>24</sup> Rom 11:36.

<sup>25</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1998), 31.

<sup>26</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> The church (e.g. Eph 1:22) is the ἐκκλησία, the gathered, summoned, or called assembly

<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor 1:30; 6:17; Heb 3:14.

<sup>29</sup> “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).



God calls us to himself and places us in Christ who is now our life, lord, and lover. From these headwaters,<sup>30</sup> all that flows through our lives comes from our indissoluble union with Christ forming the currents and contours, shape and movement to the calling of God.

The conversation has taken an abrupt turn, hasn't it? The question "What am I supposed to do with my life?" has suddenly been turned on its head. In all sincerity, all you may have wanted to know is whether God wants you to be a brain surgeon or a plumber, whether he wants you to marry this boy or that girl, whether you should give your money to the poor or invest it in a startup business. But, the locus of the question has shifted from self to God. The initial question is not wrong or worthless, but it distracts us from our true focus. We realize that the map directing us to the answer is taking us to that destination by another and perhaps unexpected route.

### Faith

Our response to God's call to himself is to believe him, a belief that deepens and matures into enduring love and tested loyalty in the life of faith. Responding to God's call also changes the pronouns we use in our question.

We reveal ourselves to be children of our time when we ask "what is *my* calling?" We ask, "What is God's will for *my* life? What particular work does he want *me* to do?" Again, these questions are not wrong *per se*, but they are frequently framed against the *angst* of the modern frenzy for self-fulfillment and the belief that identity is discovered in individual achievement. It's a pattern observed by Tocqueville in the first half of the nineteenth century

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<sup>30</sup> John 7:38 – the rivers of new life within God's children are tributaries of the rivers in the garden at the beginning (Gen 2:10) and in city of the world made new (Rev 22:2). "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High" (Ps 46:4); cf. Ps 1.

in the proliferation of “associations.”<sup>31</sup> This fragmentation of cultural cohesiveness in America was fueled by the spreading influence of the Enlightenment-energized belief that fulfillment and identity required autonomous differentiation and independence. In our public political life, such independence expresses our cherished and hard-won freedom. But in the kingdom of God, such independence and autonomy is anarchy. So, it’s no surprise that the American passion for freedom and self-determination quickly infected assumptions of Christian spirituality and principles of Christian discipleship. The response to God’s call was less and less worked out in the community of God’s people and was more and more worked out in private experimentation. In this liberated perspective, one could be assured that he or she had followed the path of God’s will and blessing by experiencing the confidence that one had lived up to one’s God-given potential.<sup>32</sup>

The call of God inaugurates not a journey of self-discovery but a life of faith in which we entrust ourselves, body and soul, to our faithful creator.<sup>33</sup> We would be hard-pressed to think of Job as someone who was on a quest for independent fulfillment. Rather he says with tested faith, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”<sup>34</sup> But Job’s submission to God anticipates the ultimate submission of Jesus to the will of the Father. As Isaac meekly and quietly stretched his young body on the wood of the altar prepared for him

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<sup>31</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life I Letters and Politics*, Olivier Zunz and Alan S. Kahan, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 180-190 – Tocqueville admires the fluid nature of American culture that enables and encourages associations that form around shared interest in political, moral, spiritual, and economic ideals. But the rise of associations parallels the deeper current of individualism that is fragmenting the heart of American culture. In the end these associations merely reinforce the legitimacy of giving priority in public life to individual interest.

<sup>32</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 287-88. Bellah calls for a “return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one’s own advancement” or fulfillment.

<sup>33</sup> *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord’s Day 1, in Mark Noll, ed. *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 137.

<sup>34</sup> Job 1:21.

by his father, so Jesus gave his body to the cross, the wood of sacrifice prepared by his Father, the final and conclusive demonstration of how he had lived his whole life. Jesus spoke the words given to him by the Father and performed the works as directed by the Father so that he might accomplish God's purpose and our salvation.<sup>35</sup> This pattern of Jesus' submission informs every other relationship into which we are called to live and serve: marriage, children, employment, government, church.<sup>36</sup>

Faith is the action of entrusting our lives into the safe-keeping of another. It is an act of love as much as it is an act of trust. We believe God will keep his promises and be true to his word. We trust God not only to care for us in this life but also to complete us as part of the world made new and to bring us safely home. Faith expresses our conviction that *care* is superior to *control* – that is, God's care is infinitely preferable to self control (in the sense that we play God and attempt to manage life with our own imagined omnipotence and omniscience).

Yet, faith of this sort could be little more than a spiritualized pragmatism if not accompanied by the belief that God the Father Almighty has the *right* to order, direct, and control our lives. Yielding our lives to God's good government is often merely an accommodating nod that we can see the good in such an abdication – it seems to us to be a fair trade since the benefits outweigh the inconvenience. However, a response of faith at being called to God demands an even deeper level of trust. Put in the starkest possible terms we say to God: "You have the right to do with me whatever you choose to do whether I like

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<sup>35</sup> John 10:37; 17:8.

<sup>36</sup> "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.... Live wisely...and understand what the will of the Lord is.... Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:1-2, 15, 17, 21). Honoring, incarnating, and imitating Christ in our lives is the call to submission not only to God supremely, but also to one another in all relationships of life.

it, see the good in it, or comprehend the justice of it.<sup>37</sup> You are God; I am not; do what you will.” This is the faith of those like Jeremiah, Hosea, Mary, as well as William Carey, Amy Carmichael, and Jim Eliot.

The potter and the clay is probably the most vivid analogy employed by Scripture to illustrate God’s right to have his way in our lives.<sup>38</sup> “O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. We are all the work of your hand.”<sup>39</sup> The Potter shapes some vessels for noble use and others for common use<sup>40</sup> at his discretion.

If our very existence comes from the Creator’s omnipotent and free determination, how can the ordering and fulfillment of that existence be any less the work of his sovereign hand?<sup>41</sup> The corrective that the Apostle Paul gives to a fragmented and free-spirited congregation in Corinth is the reminder: “You are not your own. You have been bought with a price.”<sup>42</sup> The Lamb of God owns us having purchased us with his own blood. Therefore, “[t]he source of our vocation must be none other and no less than God himself.”<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the analogy of the potter and clay illustrates without explaining to our satisfaction. The act of trusting God and entrusting our lives to him, even the act of confessing his power, love, and wisdom, does not clear away all the wild mystery of his providence. God always acts in ways consistent with his character and with his covenant – as

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<sup>37</sup> Deut 32:29; 2 Sam 2:6-9; Ps 75:7

<sup>38</sup> “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?” declares the LORD. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (Jer 18:6). “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” (Rom 9:21) – cf Isa 29:16; 45:9; Matt 20:15.

<sup>39</sup> Isa 64:8.

<sup>40</sup> Rom 9:21.

<sup>41</sup> Yahweh has the right to do what he will with all that he has made (Gen 45:5-9; 50:19-20; Ps 83:18; Isa 45:7; 50:2), with governments (Dan 2:20-23); with agriculture (Isa 5:5-7); with life and death (Deut 32:39); with pregnancy (I Sam 1:5-6); with wealth, poverty, and status (I Sam 2:6-10); with light and darkness, well-being and calamity (Isa 45:6-7); with Christ (John 19:10-11); with Satan (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10; Luke 22:31).

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor 6:20; cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 7:23; Rev 5:9.

<sup>43</sup> Badcock, *The Way of Life*, 71.

God, he cannot do otherwise. But in this mortal life we “see though a glass, darkly.”<sup>44</sup> God acts (or doesn’t act) in ways that often mystify, boggle, or anger us because we lack the capacity to understand how his actions are in every way good, right, and just. Yahweh pummels Job with questions as his faithful servant struggles to trust and to make sense of what is happening in his life,<sup>45</sup> yet in response and confession Job can only lay his hand upon his mouth and be silent.<sup>46</sup> William Cowper captures this trust in his poetry often set to a haunting minor key tune that hints of mystery:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform...  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face....  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.<sup>47</sup>

Or, as Mr. Beaver says of the never-to-be-tamed Aslan, “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”<sup>48</sup>

Thus we respond to the call of God in faith. Or, as Charles Wesley concludes his hymn, “Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim,”

Then let us adore, and give Him His right,  
All glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
All honor and blessing, with angels above,  
And thanks never ceasing, and infinite love.

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<sup>44</sup> 1 Cor 13:12 KJV.

<sup>45</sup> Job 38-41.

<sup>46</sup> Job 40:4.

<sup>47</sup> William Cowper, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” (1774), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Jan 08, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Harper, 2009), 77.

## Brokenness

The call of God requires faith. It also assumes brokenness. Brokenness is the context in which we must exercise faith in responding to God's summons. "Weak and wounded, sick and sore"<sup>49</sup> – this is who we are. In spite of creation's grandeur and glory and the splendor of human achievement, this is the way the world is – the world of darkness into which God has been bringing life and light from the beginning, the world in which Christ calls us and brings us salvation, and the world into which the Spirit sends us as bearers of the good news and agents of grace. Brokenness is the backdrop for the drama of redemption that God accomplishes in Christ, and it is the context in which Jesus himself announces the beginning of his public work: I have come to "proclaim good news to the poor,...liberty to the captives,...recovering of sight to the blind,...liberty to those who are oppressed."<sup>50</sup> We must not brush aside these images as mere metaphors for spiritual brokenness. Any view of work, calling, and vocation that does not situate itself in the very real lives of "men and women as they are in the world"<sup>51</sup> is far from the heart of the gospel.

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph Hart, "Come Ye Sinners Poor and Needy," (1759), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Jan 08, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>51</sup> Lloyd-Jones, in his sermon on Acts 3:12-18, carefully, but correctly presses this distinction when he calls us to begin our presentation and understanding of the gospel with God rather than with Jesus. In our eagerness to make Christ and the good news known, we often rush to present Christ and thereby neglect the reason we need Christ. "I speak carefully because I know I am liable to be misunderstood at this point, but this to me is a very vital part of Christian teaching and of the Christian message. You do not start with the Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder if perhaps most of our troubles in the Christian church today are due to just that. We must start with God. We start with the whole message of the Bible. There is a modern conception of evangelism that regards it as simply saying to people, 'Come to Jesus.' This view says you do not need to talk about repentance; rather, if they are in trouble or are unhappy, you just tell them to come to Him. You start with Him and end with Him. But that is not Christian preaching.... The first step in Christian preaching is to tell men and women that they and all their problems must always be considered in connection with God. That is the whole message of the Bible. You do not start with particular problems, but with men and women as they are in this world. How are they to be understood? It is in their relationship to God.... Men and women in their folly have rebelled against Him and brought chaos down upon themselves, but Christianity brings the message that God is concerned and is determined to do something about it. So we do not start with Jesus Christ but with God, who thought out a plan of redemption before the foundation of the world." D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Authentic Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 232-235.

Unless we recognize the enormity of our need for God and his grace – our rebellion against his *shalom*, our rejection and violation of his law, our refusal of his love, our pride and idolatry – we will have no need of him and we will see no need to turn the focus of our lives outside of self. We will be deaf to his call and we will not heed his summons. As a result, if we cannot see ourselves in need of God and his mercy, love, and grace, then we will be unable to grasp what he wants to accomplish through our lives by gathering us to himself. We will be blind to the deepest needs of our neighbors, deaf to the cries of their hearts, and cold to their plight apart from God.

The summons of God calls us out of and away from all that is destroying us. His call rescues us from death feeding on death, a corruption that will end in a nightmarish horror that we will love too much to abandon. As we begin to recognize how death has deceived and enslaved us and how helpless we are in its grasp, we begin to marvel that God has commanded our freedom, life, and liberty. We were lost under the weight of his condemnation.<sup>52</sup>

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.<sup>53</sup>

As we see what we once were before God called us to himself, two things happen. First, we begin to wonder why a holy God who needs nothing outside himself would take any notice of us in our rebellion and sin and why he would bother or have any desire to rescue

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<sup>52</sup> John 3:17-18.

<sup>53</sup> Eph 2:4-10.

us. Second, we begin to see the world as he sees it and share his heart of holiness, love, sorrow, and hope.

The Psalmist David asks God the same question we have often asked: “What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet,” he adds with more than a little wonder and irony, “you have made men and women a little lower than God,” that is a little lower than yourself. You have “crowned humans with glory and honor. You have given us mortals dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under our feet.”<sup>54</sup> So, as CS Lewis reminds each of us as we often stumble through life, “You have never met a mere mortal.”<sup>55</sup> There is no such thing as an ordinary human being. No man or woman, boy or girl, is just an animated bag of bones that is merely the latest link on some merely mechanical and impersonal chain of development.

How is it that we have been crowned with this nearly God-like glory? Our un-ordinary status as humans comes from a gift given by divine benediction upon all men and women at the dawn of creation. Upon humans, and humans only, was conferred by the creator his own image. “God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness.’ So God created the human race in his own image, in the image of God he created human beings; male and female he created them.”<sup>56</sup> As kings and queens of the earth, men and women were to multiply<sup>57</sup> as a means of extending the work of God throughout the world and filling the earth with the image and glory of God. If all had gone well without the pollution and wreckage of sin, God could have looked at the earth, and as far as his eye could see, the whole earth would have been like a mirror reflecting back to him his image and glory.

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<sup>54</sup> Ps 8:4-6.

<sup>55</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Gen 1:26-27.

<sup>57</sup> Gen 1:28.



Although the carnage of sin corrupts every part of creation and every part of human existence, the image of God remains upon the human race.<sup>58</sup> The presence of God's image informs both common and redemptive grace. Civil law sets standards of justice by a recognition of the image of God.<sup>59</sup> The image of God defines ethical and moral behavior.<sup>60</sup> But ultimately, the image of God is behind God's decision to redeem his people and the world he has made as their home.

God declares his love without explaining or justifying it. As the Bible makes no effort to explain God's existence ("In the beginning, God..."), so it makes no attempt to explain his love. He is, and he does. As TV newscaster Walter Cronkite was famous for signing off, "That's the way it is." "God so loved the world..."<sup>61</sup> You know the rest of the verse. Behind Christ's gift of himself as the Saviour of his people and the redeemer of the world is the love of the triune God. The salvation that Jesus accomplishes by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension reclaims bearers of God's image so that the work of God entrusted to them at the beginning can be completed and so that the glory of God will cover the earth.

Notice the way the Apostle Paul frames the transformation that occurs in the lives of those whom God has called to himself: Put to death the idolatry of the old way of life, which merits the wrath of God. Do not live this way any longer. Lay aside all the old sinful behavior of the old self because "you have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge<sup>62</sup> after the image of its Creator."<sup>63</sup> All that is contradictory to and incompatible

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<sup>58</sup> In Ps 8 David affirms the present reality of human identity: we are fallen but still bearers of God's glory and image.

<sup>59</sup> "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed, for God made human beings in his own image" (Gen 9:6).

<sup>60</sup> "We curse people who are made in the likeness of God" (Jas 3:9).

<sup>61</sup> John 3:16. Paul's expansive "breadth and length and height and depth" description of God's love (Eph 3:18-19; cf. Rom 8:38-39) is here expressed simply as "so loved" to capture the intensity and scope of God's heart for the cosmos.

<sup>62</sup> This is a knowledge that refers not to the acquisition of information but to the intimacy of relationship.

<sup>63</sup> Col 3:5-10.

with the image of God will in the end be destroyed, so that all that is compatible with and essential to the image of God may flourish, having been renewed by the Spirit of God. redemption completes creation and assures all who trust in the grace of Christ that the image of God bestowed on us will be our greatest glory and good. When we see him face to face, we will be like him,<sup>64</sup> and when he looks upon us in the world made new he will see himself.

When God calls us to himself, he not only joins his life with ours to make us his children, but he also joins himself to us to make us share in the work he has been doing from the beginning of time.<sup>65</sup> Being called to God in redemption is an affirmation of the first work of creation, the work conferred upon us as bearers of his image, work that furthers his purpose for creation.

The gospel is not what the gospel does.<sup>66</sup> While the influence and impact of the gospel is tremendous with respect to moral and cultural transformation, our faith is not in what the gospel produces but in the gospel itself, Christ's atoning and redeeming work. That is why, *in thinking about calling, we start with our being called to God*. What God accomplished for us in the gospel is the starting point for lives lived in response to his divine and omnipotent summons to himself. Our work in the world and the vocational responses we make to God's call are not the gospel. They are *because of* the gospel, and they reveal the reality of the gospel. The success of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God in the world, falls exclusively upon the back of Christ and what he alone has done in his gospel work. That is why Christ's commission to the church is framed by the promise of his presence and power<sup>67</sup> – no person

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<sup>64</sup> 1 John 3:2

<sup>65</sup> "Man's work is a participation in God's activity,... [the] unfolding the Creator's work." John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) Kindle.

<sup>67</sup> Matt 28:18, 20.

other than Jesus by the power of his Spirit through the will of his Father is the effective cause of salvation and the reconciliation of the world to God.

The gospel having been delivered to us personally by grace through faith, the finished work of Christ having been applied to us by name, we ask, “to what end?” Of course, every Christian may answer correctly, “For my forgiveness, acceptance, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.” But thinking of the consequence of the gospel in merely individualistic terms truncates and fragments the grand narrative and the comprehensive purpose of the gospel. This sort of reductionism obscures (sometimes even to the point of denial) crucial components of Christ’s finished work. The gospel accomplishes not only our reconciliation to God, but also the reconciliation of the whole world (every part of creation) to God. The resurrection of Christ is God’s down payment on the world made new. The cosmic implications of the gospel are as sure as my own salvation. Surely Peter has in view our confidence in the consummation when he charges us to make our calling and election sure.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, as men and women made new by the gospel, we respond to what Christ has accomplished by doing two things (and we must do both, although not always in this order). We *declare* the promise and necessity of reconciliation to God by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. We *demonstrate* what reconciliation with God looks like in every area of life (righteousness, justice, compassion, creativity, healing, generosity) and thereby reveal God’s love for the world. This is the kingdom of God made visible. It is imperative to add that Christian community – Christians living in right relationship with one another – is

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<sup>68</sup> 2 Pet 1:10.

essential to our demonstration of the gospel – it is the “final apologetic”<sup>69</sup> for the trustworthiness of the gospel we declare.<sup>70</sup>

When God pursues us, we may wonder what motivates his love. God goes to great lengths to help us visualize his love that will not be denied. There is, of course, Christ, supremely. There is also the extravagance of creation. Consider, too, the living object lesson of Hosea and Gomer recorded in the Old Testament book that bears the prophet’s name. Gomer, the prostitute, whose wantonness will not be tamed by Hosea’s loving faithfulness, seems all too eager to flee his bed and reject his commitment. Yet Hosea will not abandon her or treat her as someone who has run beyond the reach of his love. He is determined to bring her home and see her restless heart at home with his. Like Joseph who considered divorcing Mary as an act of righteousness,<sup>71</sup> Hosea would have been just to end the humiliation of Gomer’s covenant mockery. But he does not. He keeps plodding toward her again and again.

Hosea’s pursuit of Gomer reveals the character of God’s love as well as the character of our calling once the Great Lover captures the heart of his Beloved. Having been drawn to Love himself, we come to love or love more deeply what moves his heart and stirs him to action. That is, we love what moves him to pour out the grace of salvation upon the world.

### Called to Work

Calling is about *who we are*. It is also about *what we do* – our work, labor, and vocation.

“What do you do?” is one of the first questions we ask in getting to know one another.

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<sup>69</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 25.

<sup>70</sup> “It is in the context of community that the Christian vocation is found and fulfilled.” Badcock, *The Way of Life*, 119.

<sup>71</sup> Mt 1:19

Work has its origin in the goodness of creation before the Fall. Work existed in the unspoiled glory of the world, and we have every reason to believe it will exist in the eternal glory of the new heaven and earth. However, work since the Fall and because of the Fall takes on an additional agency and character not present at the beginning. Work today requires sweat and labor to push back against the effects of the Fall even as it furthers the redemptive purposes of God. Work at the beginning did not have to deal with the burden of the Curse and the brokenness of sin. Now, however, being called to God out of our sinfulness and alienation joins us to the *purpose* as well as the *person* of God. Having established relationship with those upon whom he has shown mercy, the Father commissions his sons and daughters to be agents of mercy in his name<sup>72</sup> in a world now languishing in death, desperately in need of mercy.

To understand the work to which we are called *after* the Fall, we need to consider what work was *before* the Fall, since much of creational work continues in spite of sin's presence.<sup>73</sup> The Bible and the song of creation in Genesis 1 begin with the action of God – this is God simultaneously at work and play.<sup>74</sup> “In the beginning, God created.”<sup>75</sup> As God calls the creation into being, he also calls it to action (not mere existence or repose) – he calls it to work.<sup>76</sup> All living things, plant and animal, fish and fowl, are created to act, to engage in the work and joy of abundant multiplication. In addition to that common creaturely action,

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<sup>72</sup> Matt 28:19-20; Mark 5:19; Luke 6:36; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; 2 Cor 3:6; 5:20-21

<sup>73</sup> “Before I became a Christian I do not think I fully realized that one’s life, after conversion, would inevitably consist in doing most of the same things one had been doing before; one hopes, in a new spirit, but still the same things.... Christianity does not simply replace our natural life and substitute a new one; it is rather a new organization which exploits, to its own supernatural ends, these natural materials.” C.S. Lewis, “Learning in Wartime” in *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 51, 54. “God’s fundamental and original intention with regard to man, whom he created in his image and after his likeness, was not withdrawn or cancelled out even when man [broke] the original covenant with God.” John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> Job 38:7. God characterizes his creational activity as being filled with exuberant joy, dancing, and celebration.

<sup>75</sup> Gen 1:1.

<sup>76</sup> “Work is the natural exercise and function of man.” Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?” in *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1949), 53.

humans are entrusted with the work of “dominion.” God speaks uniquely to his image bearers: “fill the earth and subdue it,” and “work it and keep it.”<sup>77</sup>

Fill, subdue, work, and keep are all divine commands given before the world was spoiled by sin. These are all actions originally performed without the adversarial power of sin that now makes them more difficult by frustrating their success. But it is important for us to understand that these actions, these creational duties, have their origin in God’s design and are not necessary merely because of the fallenness of the world.

*God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."  
Genesis 1:28*

### Fill the earth

Old Testament scholar, Jack Collins, notes the parallel between the multiplication and filling that are the work of the first Adam and the multiplication and filling that are the work of the second Adam.<sup>78</sup> The unmistakable affirmation of Pentecost is that the multiplication of followers of Christ and the increase of the church continues a global work designed to fill the earth with the people of God.<sup>79</sup> But this is an extension of work as it was in the beginning. The work of multiplication is an activity common to all living creatures – it is a consequence of existence, and it is an expression of parental care.<sup>80</sup> However, now that sin has made death a destructive weapon against the goodness of creation, filling becomes a way

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<sup>77</sup> Gen 1:26, 28; 2:15.

<sup>78</sup> C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 88.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20.

<sup>80</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 61.

of claiming victory over the consequences of the Fall. So, the action of filling occurs “far as the curse is found”<sup>81</sup> as it seeks to value, sustain, and impart the good gift of life.<sup>82</sup> The global comprehensiveness of the command “to fill” affirms the scope of God’s purpose in creation and redemption. As Tim Keller summarizes, “The whole earth is good. The whole earth is fallen. The whole world is going to be redeemed.”<sup>83</sup>

### Subdue it and have dominion

In addition to common creaturely work, the Creator assigns humans a distinctly royal responsibility. Subduing (or, having dominion) is the domain of sovereigns who extend the borders of their kingdoms. Napoleon, Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, or Hitler may come to mind at the mention of *subdue* and *have dominion* – hardly the images of divine benevolence. Frankly, it is difficult for us to imagine a human sovereign subduing without violence, *subduing without forceful subjugation, without destruction and abuse*. You may think of corporate mergers and take-overs, tyrannical bosses, coercive pastors, or overbearing parents. Yet the work given to women and men as divine image bearers is the covenantal responsibility to rule as God rules, to govern in a way that cares for life as much as he does and nurtures it to flourishing.<sup>84</sup> While subduing is a strong action invested with royal power, the creational covenant cannot include any of the abuses of power with which we all too frequently associate (even in the lives of Christians) domination and subjection. God has designed for work to situate us in life with an outward focus not only upon him,

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<sup>81</sup> Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World,” (1719), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Jan 08, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> Filling creates what is not there; subduing orders what is there. Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 33.

<sup>83</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 162-163.

<sup>84</sup> “The purpose of human dominion over nature is the preservation of the integrity of the non-human creation, not simply the satisfaction of human needs and wants.” Volz, *Work in the Spirit*, 147.

but also upon the whole world entrusted to our care. To subdue is to exercise stewardship and “benevolent care”<sup>85</sup> for the creation and to bring the *shalom* of God to the world.<sup>86</sup> In the exercise of dominion our “aim is not to ‘win,’ but to serve,”<sup>87</sup> and God has called us to be a kingdom of priests – a servant nation.<sup>88</sup>

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.  
Genesis 2:15*

### Work it

As the creation narrative unfolds, Yahweh elaborates what it means to exercise kingly dominion. In Genesis 2, he repeats his command to subdue by dividing the task into two components: to work (עבד) and to keep. With the exception of Genesis 2:15, the first several occurrences of עבד in Genesis refer to working the ground, tilling, farming, and cultivation. But the larger sense of עבד implied in 2:15 conveys the same notion of cultivation applied to every area of creation – using existing materials to make something new or employing tools to accomplish a task. As the use of עבד unfolds in the early chapters of Genesis, we observe the idea being applied to a variety of situations. It describes the process of bringing something into service as in creative tool-making or art. In the context of farming, the farmer works the ground so it gives back what the farmer wants to harvest – work causes the

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<sup>85</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2006), 425.

<sup>86</sup> In light of the connection between calling and community, it is important to note here that “having dominion” assumes and requires relationship. First, the steward of creation serves the lord of creation – human work is done in relationship with the creator. Second, the stewardship of creation serves the creation itself – human work is done in the world with a love for the world. Third, the stewardship of creation is a shared responsibility – human work is carried out jointly from and by the community of image bearers.

<sup>87</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 178.

<sup>88</sup> John Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 263, in Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 121.



land to serve the purpose of the farmer.<sup>89</sup> In the context of human relationships, it refers to labor or slavery – one person works for another to produce the outcome desired by the master or employer.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps most significantly, however, עָבַד describes the action of worship – servants of God rendering service to God.<sup>91</sup> Our work fulfills God’s desire and purpose for us as his image bearers thus anticipating the Apostle Paul’s image of the church as God’s field.<sup>92</sup> עָבַד, then, brings into view at least three essential dimensions of culture: art or creativity, management or organization, and worship. Work (עָבַד) is the mandate to make culture and view work as worship, all before the Fall.

Richard Mouw offers a playful description of what this kind of work might have looked like in the garden lives of Adam and Eve as they invent tools and delegate labor before the face of God.<sup>93</sup> “Whether it’s a symphony or a coal mine, all work is an act of creating and comes from the same source.... [It is] the capacity to see, to connect, and make what had not been seen, connected, and made before.”<sup>94</sup>

As with dominion, work is carried out in three-fold relationship: the worker with the stuff of earth, the workers with one another either as co-laborers or in service to another, and the workers with the Lord of creation. Engaging in עָבַד produces culture – the fruitfulness of imagination, the order and collaboration of enterprise, and the activity of work being transformed into worship. While seminal in the primeval garden scene, עָבַד is the activity of culture-making, the process of acting out the reality that image bearers are made

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<sup>89</sup> Gen 2:5 (“there was no one to *work* the ground”); 3:23; 4:2, 12.

<sup>90</sup> Gen 9:25 (“a *servant* of *servants* shall he be to his brothers”); 12:16; 14:14, 15; 15:13-14.

<sup>91</sup> Gen 9:26-27; 18:3, 5; Deut 10:20 (“Fear the Lord your God and *serve* him”); 13:4.

<sup>92</sup> 1 Cor. 3:9.

<sup>93</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 35-36.

<sup>94</sup> Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 782.

for the world, for one another, and for God. We have been created to make the world more than it is right now. We work toward the future.

Therefore, “the appropriate theological framework for developing a theology of work is not anthropology, but an all-encompassing eschatology.”<sup>95</sup> Miroslav Volf insists that “a theology of work based on the concept of new creation purports to be a *normative* understanding of work.”<sup>96</sup> Richard Bauckham agrees: “The church is those people who, so far, acknowledge God’s rule as he is implementing it in Jesus and live for others in the light of the coming of his kingdom in all creation.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, the culture-making trajectory of work, even before the Fall, has always been the completion of creation and the consummation of God’s purpose.

In the life of the church today, however, we often live at one of two distorted poles. At one end, we live with the often competitive pursuit of culture-making that is indifferent to or dismissive of worship – this is a detachment from God that results in idolatry. At the other end, we live with the often fear-driven withdrawal that regards culture-making as incompatible with to worship – this is a detachment from the world that produces indifference, isolation, and ultimately injustice.

### Keep it

Yahweh calls his image bearers to a second action of exercising dominion: to keep (שָׁמַר). שָׁמַר has a trajectory that is distinct from עָבַד (to work). עָבַד looks forward from what *is* to what *will be* in both operational and eschatological dimensions. By contrast, שָׁמַר stands in the

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<sup>95</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 85.

<sup>96</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 81.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 49.

present and looks back. “The basic idea of [שמר] is ‘to exercise great care over.’”<sup>98</sup> The kind of care in view includes guarding and protecting (in a military sense), caring for and preserving life (as in the sense of family nurture), and maintaining obligations and commitments (in a covenantal sense).<sup>99</sup> The activity of שמר is all about stewardship and faithfulness. It’s about valuing the integrity of what has been entrusted to us as caretakers. שמר does not claim ownership, but rather proclaims: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”<sup>100</sup>

When Cain retorts to the Lord after his murder of Abel, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>101</sup> he is tacitly acknowledging the creational responsibility of שמר. Yes, he really does have a duty to preserve his brother’s life. Furthermore, I believe this duty has a deeply ontological character. That is, image bearers are called to serve in such a way that all aspects of the creation might exist as God intended them to exist. Cain should have asked, had he behaved righteously, “How can I serve Abel so that he is all that Abel was created to be.” The movie, *Groundhog Day*, ends with the question of a righteous heart. The formerly obnoxiously selfish but now humbled Phil Connors asks Rita, “What can I do for you today?”<sup>102</sup> This is the same character embedded in the not-goodness of Adam’s aloneness and in his need for a helper – the pairing and joining of Adam and Eve is a completing action by one serving the other. Furthermore, we can say that Adam and Eve’s sin was, in a very important way, disobedience of God’s call to keep. Our first parents failed to protect and preserve God’s law, and they failed to maintain covenant fidelity with Yahweh. They demonstrated an over-

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<sup>98</sup> R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 939.

<sup>99</sup> שמר is used in Gen 3:24 of the angel guarding the garden upon the expulsion of Adam and Eve; in 4:9 by Cain when asking Yahweh if he must accept responsibility for caring for and preserving the life of his brother; and in 17:9 when Yahweh demands covenant fidelity of Abram.

<sup>100</sup> Ps 24:1.

<sup>101</sup> Gen 4:9.

<sup>102</sup> *Groundhog Day*, directed by Harold Ramis (Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1993), DVD.

reaching pride, a discontentment with who God had made them to be and with the way Yahweh had ordered the world. In abandoning  $\text{מִשְׁׁׁ}$  they declared that they wanted to change who they were as well as how they related to God and the world. But their demands were anti-creational and destructive. Therefore, because  $\text{מִשְׁׁ}$  demands fidelity to Yahweh, both  $\text{מִשְׁׁ}$  (to keep) as well as  $\text{בָּרָא}$  (to make) are acts of worship – God has designed our work to be integral to our worship.

To understand redemptive work, we have to understand creational work and the ways in which there is profound continuity between the two.<sup>103</sup> *Filling* speaks to the scope and character of our work – joyful, extravagant abundance that covers the earth and every area of life. *Dominion* speaks to our royal rule and the God-like use of power in two ways: working and keeping. *Working* calls us to creative culture-making in a life of worship. *Keeping* calls us to faithful stewardship in a life of worship. When God calls us to himself through his redemptive re-creation, he also calls us to continue to fulfill the purpose for which he created us as his image bearers.

### Called into the World

Calling is about *who* we are and *what* we do. Calling is also about *where* we express who we are and do what we do. Or, to put it another way, Yahweh calls us to a *person*, himself. He calls his image bearers to a *purpose*, which is rooted in a creation that is being redeemed. He also calls us to a *place*, the creation itself in which the creational and redemptive dimensions

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<sup>103</sup> We do not ignore the catastrophic discontinuity sin has imposed on work. But our understanding of work begins with its design, not its distortion. Work is ontologically connected to image bearing. As one continues, so does the other.

of his purpose unfold. The completion of creation will not remove us to some immaterial and disembodied existence. Rather God himself in the end will make his home among us in the world made new so that as Michael Wittmer affirms in the title of his book, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. The place in which we live in the presence of God and enact the purpose of God is the world. The created universe. Our home forever.

Now, it may seem to be little more than stating the obvious to say that we enact God's calling here on Earth (or, on Mars, if NASA happens to set up a colony there). Where else can we express our love, loyalty, and obedience to Yahweh than in our own skin and on the ground under our feet?<sup>104</sup> There are not any other options. So, this aspect of calling is not really about *where* we live. Rather, it is about our *relationship* to where we live – our relationship to the creation as we carry out God's calling and pursue his purpose as his image bearers.

One reason we may have uncertainty about what sort of relationship we should have to the creation is that the Bible seems to send mixed messages about how we are to relate to the world. On the one hand, Scripture has some harsh things to say about loving the world. Jesus said, "I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."<sup>105</sup> "Demas, in love with this present world," abandoned Paul and presumably his commitment to Christ.<sup>106</sup> "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world."<sup>107</sup> These statements seem black and white: to love God demands that we not love the world.

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<sup>104</sup> "To live the Christian life means for Christ to live his life *in a person* through the Spirit." Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 141 (emphasis added).

<sup>105</sup> John 15:19.

<sup>106</sup> 2 Tim 4:10.

<sup>107</sup> 1 John 2:15.

While we must agree with this assessment and these commands of Scripture, we must also make a critical distinction. The *world* that we are not to love is the allied system of evil incarnated within the creation that opposes God. This alliance is our enemy, and we wrestle against it, plying the weapons of God toward its destruction.<sup>108</sup> Sin (in many ways paralleling and mocking our hopes for the gospel) has permeated and infected the whole created order to the degree, we may say correctly that it occupies every part of the world. Its presence in the whole of creation is so powerful that we are tempted (unless informed otherwise by Scripture) to believe that it defines the whole of creation. But it does not. “It is the world that has been pulled over [our] eyes.”<sup>109</sup>

The world alliance that we are to not love is immense, present, and powerful – it is the enemy of God and of all who are loyal to the Great King, Jesus.<sup>110</sup> However, by contrast, there is the created world that God loves and that we are to love in the same way he loves it. Our love for the world should be as sweeping, vigorous, passionate, and unapologetic as God’s love for all that he has made and all that he is redeeming.

While God’s love for the world may seem indisputable to many observers, it is worth affirming at least by way of panoramic overview for those who have a hard time seeing it. As a parent loves a child, God loves all that he has made. His delight in his creation is evident by his repeated choral benediction of “it is good.”<sup>111</sup> The very existence of life along with the extravagant beauty and the amazing intricacy of the world testify of his love. The sorrow of God over sin and the effects of sin upon his creation as well as his jealous anger against all that assaults and degrades his creation bespeak his love. His law governing the care of

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<sup>108</sup> Eph 6:12.

<sup>109</sup> *The Matrix*, dir. Andy and Lana Wachowski (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999), DVD. – Morpheus.

<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the same tension already noted related to culture-making applies to the world itself – we often live between the poles of idolatry, indifference, and isolation.

<sup>111</sup> Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 25.

human relationships and the stuff of the world as well as his attention to the physical detail (the structure, ornamentation, and beauty) of how he is to be worshiped all reveal his love for the world. Consider, too, how God delights in the sensory aspects of the worship and life of his people.<sup>112</sup> The tears of the prophets mingle with the tears of Christ at the brokenness, suffering, and rebellion of the world he loves – tears that are savored by Yahweh in the glory of his holiness.<sup>113</sup> There can be no doubt that God’s relentless pursuit of his sin-filled creation proclaims his love – from his seeking Adam and Eve in the garden, to his patient faithfulness and long-suffering forgiveness, to his attentive responsiveness to pleas for help and mercy.<sup>114</sup> But, of course, the greatest demonstration of God’s love for the world is Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.”<sup>115</sup>

Notice that the love of God for the world goes far beyond merely the Father’s gift of the Son to the world. This love includes the Son’s willing acceptance of humiliation and the taking up of the cross in the incarnation – he takes the stuff of earth to himself, mingling mysteriously his eternal being with our mortality. But the mystery of love goes deeper still. Having accomplished the work for which the Father gifted him to the world, Jesus keeps to himself and remains joined with all that he has redeemed. He is permanently one of us – the creator is now forever part of the creation for the sake of love. God is not ashamed to be our God,<sup>116</sup> and Jesus is not ashamed to be our brother.<sup>117</sup> Surely his lack of shame declares his affection for his siblings in the family of God, and he declares that he is forever happy to be our brother and share our flesh and bone, son of Mary his mother, son of David, Abraham, and Adam.

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<sup>112</sup> Gen 8:21; 2 Cor 2:15

<sup>113</sup> Ps 56:8; Rev 8:3-4

<sup>114</sup> “From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears” (Ps 18:6).

<sup>115</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>116</sup> Heb 11:16.

<sup>117</sup> Heb 2:11.

While separated from us now so that we do not “see him,” his Spirit remains to mediate his presence and pour his love into our hearts.<sup>118</sup> And because his redeemed ones are forever “of the earth,” the creation itself is inextricably part of God’s loving redemption.<sup>119</sup> We will not be left homeless, but the world will be made new for us, with Christ joining us here, his resurrected toes curling into the soil of the new heaven and earth made one,<sup>120</sup> the King of Kings receiving the glory of the kings and queens of the nations.<sup>121</sup>

There is no stronger or more vivid image of the relationship between God and his people than that of the Lover and his Beloved. In fact, a whole book of the Bible is dedicated to this image. But the physical union of humans is no mere illustration of God’s love. In ways we do not fully understand, God himself joins in the sexuality of human relationships from being the one who joins us in marriage,<sup>122</sup> to being present in immoral sexual unions,<sup>123</sup> to being active in marriage for the sanctification of spouses and children.<sup>124</sup> He is a present part of our lives, not just an observer, and the only confident explanation we have for this invested involvement is his deep, deep love for us. He wants our love to be defined and energized by his love so that his love in us may complete his love for us.<sup>125</sup> As Isaac Watts penned in his Advent hymn:

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> “His love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

<sup>119</sup> Rom 8:19.

<sup>120</sup> “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15); Maltbie D. Babcock, “This Is My Father’s World,” (1901), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Jan 08, 2013) – “This is my Father’s world: the battle is not done:/Jesus Who died shall be satisfied,/And earth and Heav’n be one.”

<sup>121</sup> Isa 60:3-5; Rev 21:24

<sup>122</sup> Matt 19:6

<sup>123</sup> 1 Cor 6:15

<sup>124</sup> 1 Cor 7:14

<sup>125</sup> John 14:23; 15:9; Phil 2:2

<sup>126</sup> Watts, *Joy to the World*.



And prove it we shall, both in this life and in the life to come. It is our calling.

The Apostle Paul assures us that because of Jesus' resurrection and because of the indissoluble union of God's people with Christ, "this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality."<sup>127</sup> But by "imperishable" and "immortal," Paul does not mean immaterial. Our glorified body will be like that of Jesus' glorified body for he will make us like he is. Similarly, when the Apostle Peter speaks about the world's being prepared for destruction by fire,<sup>128</sup> he does not mean the eradication of the world. He means the purification of the world and the refining fire of God's judgment. As he says in verse 13, this kind of fire is the means by which God will make the world new.

Because God loves the world, matter matters. Such a belief ennobles the ordinary and invisible tasks of life. As our heavenly Father knows the hairs upon our head and the sparrows that fall to the ground,<sup>129</sup> so the smallest, most routine details of life do not escape his loving attention. Our work does not have to be spectacular or even measurably worthy (by some sort of invented standard) to be significant and valuable to God. George Eliot concludes *Middlemarch* with this tribute to those who worked faithfully even though unseen and unheralded in their time: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."<sup>130</sup> The true significance of our labor and accomplishment cannot be limited only to results (or lack thereof) that we witness, and we must not be seduced into believing otherwise. "Vocation is

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<sup>127</sup> 1 Cor 15:53.

<sup>128</sup> 2 Pet 2:12-13.

<sup>129</sup> Matt 10:29-30.

<sup>130</sup> Emily Esfahani Smith, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy," *The Atlantic*, January 09, 2013, <http://m.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805> (accessed November 01, 2013).

collaboration with God, often in ways that we may never see, in his ongoing work in the creation.”<sup>131</sup>

Matter matters to the creator, and matter matters to all who have been called to pursue the purpose for which God has Created and Redeemed the world. But loving the world with the heart of God includes loving the world with the mind of God, and we must learn to recognize how love for the world can run amuck.

### Loving the world too much

Sin in Eden and since Eden has been, essentially, loving the creature and the creation more than the creator – giving undue loyalty and allegiance to anything other than the one, true, eternal God. Giving love that belongs to God alone to anything else is idolatry,<sup>132</sup> and none of us is exempt from the temptation to idolatry. Therefore, we must not be naïve about the very real potential that a godly love for the world and the good gifts of God<sup>133</sup> can very subtly shift into a sinful love that, in the end, is not only rebellious to God, but also destructive to self, one another, and the world. Also, when we love the world too much, we invest it with power that belongs to God alone – we become idealistic in believing that the world has the power to heal itself and actualize its full potential, and we become materialistic in believing that the world is all that exists.

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<sup>131</sup> Anthony Bradley, "The Four Questions of Christian Education," Entry posted March 12, 2014, <http://blog.acton.org/archives/66570-four-questions-christian-education.html> (accessed March 14, 2014).

<sup>132</sup> Rom 1:25.

<sup>133</sup> 2 Kgs 18:4 – God’s people turned the bronze serpent into an object of worship.

## Loving the world too little

Gnosticism has been around since before Jesus -- attempting to divide the world into matter and spirit in a way that values spirit over matter. The Gnostic error has opened the door both to the invention of false mystery religions and privatized spirituality as well as to the distortion of true religion. William Diehl observes that when the church fails to connect the world of work with the kingdom of God, it is only natural to conclude that we live in two worlds. “Dualism thrives”<sup>134</sup> as does Gnosticism. When a higher priority is placed on the realm of the spirit (or even the world of ideas), the material is inevitably devalued. Matter, the physical stuff of the world, becomes unimportant, ugly, contaminated, and even evil.

Separating matter from spirit denies the declaration of the creator that the world is “good,” and followed to its logical conclusion renders the incarnation an act that pollutes the very being of God. Yet, because the world we see is so riddled with suffering, sin, and brokenness, it is understandable that some people wonder, “How can there be anything good about a world that is so shot through with evil and sin and injustice?” When the world becomes disgusting and loathsome to us, we find it increasingly difficult to believe that it can be saved or is even worth redeeming. The door is then wide open to every imaginable injustice. To conclude that the world is nothing more than what it appears to be through our own sinful and fallen perspective is to ignore or even deny the presence and promise of God. This, too, is another form of idolatry – awarding to ourselves an omniscience that rightfully belongs only to God.

God loves the world, and therefore is fully present in it. When David asks Yahweh the question in Psalm 139, “Where can I go from your presence?” the answer is simply,

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<sup>134</sup> William E. Diehl, *In Search of Faithfulness: Lessons from the Christian Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 42.

“nowhere.” The list of places David might consider going to escape God’s presence pretty much covers all the possibilities. To each suggestion, Yahweh answers, “I am there, too, and, I am even in your thoughts as well as the synapses and impulses running through your brain.” But Psalm 139 is not a geography quiz. Yes, David affirms, “everywhere that man can be, Thou, God, art present there.”<sup>135</sup> But David means more than affirming God’s omnipresence – he is affirming the *fullness* of God’s presence. That is, everywhere that God is, he is present in the fullness of his triune being. At no time and in no place is God ever deficient or missing any of his character or attributes. So, as the Psalm concludes, David praises God for bringing salvation wherever he is present.

This affirmation has tremendous implications for our understanding of calling and the place in which calling is lived out. As God is fully present in his whole being (all his virtues and attributes) in every place in the entire universe, so God’s calling can be enacted in every place in which he is present. In every place in which God is present, he is actively working out his creational and redemptive purpose. Therefore, all who have been called to God and joined to God in Christ work out that purpose with him precisely where they are at every moment and in every place. Furthermore, there is no person or element in the whole of creation that is not grist in his hands for his eternal purpose.<sup>136</sup> Even the winds and waves serve him.<sup>137</sup>

Martin Luther defined spirituality as “life in the world oriented toward God.”<sup>138</sup> Today, spirituality is a hot topic and in the culture at large can mean just about anything. Popular notions of spirituality usually refer to little more than self-awareness or well-being. A

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<sup>135</sup> Isaac Watts, “I Sing th’ Almighty Pow’r of God,” (1715), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Jan 08, 2013).

<sup>136</sup> Rom 8:28.

<sup>137</sup> Mark 4:41.

<sup>138</sup> Alister McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change: Rediscovering the Spirit of the Reformers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 33.

Christian understanding of spirituality means that while we are more than matter, the non-corporeal part of our being is nonetheless embodied and part of the creation. Spirituality means that we are made for relationship with God in the material world. As spiritual beings, we long to be connected to our heart's true home. As Augustine prayed, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."<sup>139</sup> However, Luther insists that we think of living as spiritual people, not in the disembodied ether, but "in the world." As with calling, there is no other place for us to be spiritual than in that place in which God has created and redeemed us and in which Christ has accomplished salvation. Being spiritual – or as the Apostle Paul might say, letting the mind of Christ "be in you"<sup>140</sup> – means always keeping God in view from wherever we are in this world. As Peter quotes David in Psalm 16 in his Pentecost sermon, "I saw the Lord always before me."<sup>141</sup> We are never to lose sight of him in the diapers, deadlines, and traffic jams of life. Spirituality is learning to make the connections between all the stuff of this life and the person and purpose of God.

Spirituality, far from taking us out of this world and away from our embodied lives, presses us ever more deeply into creational life entrusted to our care as stewards of the work of redemption. Spirituality requires us constantly to be making adjustments, corrections – tilting the shades as the sun moves across the sky so that the most light possible comes streaming through the windows.<sup>142</sup> But we are the ones relentlessly in motion, spinning and twisting around the sun. Therefore, the challenge we face in responding to God's call, having placed him at the center of life as creator and redeemer, is to learn to recognize the relationship that all of life has to him. Spirituality is the conviction of the Spirit that every

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<sup>139</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Henry Chadwick, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>140</sup> Phil 2:5, KJV.

<sup>141</sup> Acts 2:25.

<sup>142</sup> The Reformation motto, *semper reformanda*, stated in Latin's gerundive supine tense, means that the church is always to be in the state of reformation. Or, the church is constantly to be reforming (repenting, maturing).

part of our lives can indeed be lived for his glory and as his grace for the common good.

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>143</sup>

The implications are profound. Since God precedes us (as well as accompanies us) as we venture into the world, we may be free to love the world as he does. The possible ways we can discover to pursue the calling of God are as vast and varied as the places where God is present. Similarly, the gifting of God among the many members of the body of Christ points to the expectation that his grace will be transported in myriads of ways to every part of the creation where he is present.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, having been called to God and the presence of God having made where we stand holy ground, we need to look no further than what is at hand to do as we begin to pursue the purpose and calling of God.

### Called to a Way of Life

“Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”<sup>145</sup> Having called us to a *person*, himself, Yahweh calls his image bearers to a *purpose* that is rooted in a creation that is being redeemed. He also calls us to a *place*, the creation itself in which that purpose unfolds. Finally, he calls us to a *plan*, a model by which he employs his image bearers to move his purpose forward.

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<sup>143</sup> 1 Cor 10:31.

<sup>144</sup> When God calls people to become children of God, the Spirit gives them callings, talents, and ‘enabling’ (charisms) so that they can do God’s will in the Christian fellowship and in the world in anticipation of God’s eschatological new creation.” Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 124.

<sup>145</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 4.

In a way, we are finally back to the original question: “What does God want me to do with my life?” However, we have identified a much larger context in which to pose the question so that what we now want to ask is: “What is the plan of God for which I have been gifted to contribute?” The framework for calling is not personal fulfillment, but faith and obedience related to what God is doing in the world. The question is now: “What is my part in what God is doing?”

The answer offered by James Davison Hunter is to practice “faithful presence.”

At root, a theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God’s faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return....When the Word of all flourishing – defined by the love of Christ – becomes flesh in us, in our relations with others, within the tasks we are given, and within our sphere of influence – absence gives way to presence, and the word we speak to each other and to the world becomes authentic and trustworthy. This is the heart of a theology of presence.<sup>146</sup>

The wonderful thing about approaching calling in this way is that the sense of fulfillment in the outcome of our lives comes not from what you or I accomplish (a perspective that is rife with anxiety and uncertainty, despair or pride) but from what God has already declared to be a sure outcome as a consequence of Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension. Yes, the plan is unfolding (from our perspective), a reality that creates an often uncomfortable lack of clarity for those of us who like to have all the details figured out. But the lack of clarity is due only to our limited knowledge and vision, and is not a reason to doubt that the outcome is uncertain in any way. When the Lamb seated on the throne observes that the Apostle John is slack-jawed at the vision of the consummation, he directs John to start taking notes: “Behold, I am making all things new. Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 243, 253.

<sup>147</sup> Rev 21:5.

The written reassurance of God's promised completion of his purpose helps us while we wait and continue to work over the many generations of history. Even a casual reader of Scripture will observe the plodding millennia from Abraham to Christ and conclude that God is not in a hurry. The disciples were impatient for Jesus to complete his work and for the kingdom of God to be established on the earth.<sup>148</sup> Cynics within the living memory of Jesus' resurrection used God's patience as a reason for skepticism, "Where is the promise of his coming?"<sup>149</sup> Now, two thousand years later, we must conclude that our living today, in the present, is itself the unfolding continuation of God's purpose and plan.

Our calling is to a way of life, not simply to a task or job. Our work gives expression to a purposeful way of life, but our work is not our identity or our life. Work is

a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God....Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.<sup>150</sup>

Badcock adds, "A vocation is something lived, something enacted in a concrete life story."<sup>151</sup>

Rather than looking for some secret niche in which to invest our peculiar abilities, we can think freely and widely about every part of our lives (in varying degrees) contributing to the purpose of God. We can stop reducing our lives to a job or a single task that validates our existence or somehow assures us (falsely) that God is happy with us or our work. "Not only do we not choose our vocation, but, strictly speaking, we do not find our vocation, as if

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<sup>148</sup> Luke 19:7; Acts 1:6.

<sup>149</sup> 2 Pet 3:4.

<sup>150</sup> Sayers, "Why Work?" 46-47.

<sup>151</sup> Badcock, *The Way of Life*, 53.



it is something unknown, awaiting us in the future. Rather, our vocation is already here, where we are and what we are doing now.”<sup>152</sup>

Teaching about calling is commonly framed in terms of discovery, finding something that is hidden. But if calling begins with our being joined to Christ and his work,<sup>153</sup> then the train has already left the station and we are on it. God is already at work in our lives. We are men and women, sons and daughter, citizens and neighbors – God has called us to each of these dimensions of life that are no less significant than the jobs we choose. Calling is not something that is waiting to be found somewhere in the future. Rather, calling is at work in our lives right now so that as we meet people in the coffee shop or as we encounter problems to solve at home or on the job, we may respond in the Spirit by saying, “This is what God has set before me to do.” Calling into the purpose of God is more about our response of faithful presence today than about a clearly charted plan for the future and how we will make the most of our lives.

“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”<sup>154</sup> In other words, while the course we chart for our lives (marriage, singleness, work, education, children, service) may be wise and good, God himself is the one who makes anything out of our lives. He is not at all opposed to our planning and use of wisdom – these are tools he employs regularly in the unfolding progress of our lives. But the success and value of our lives is not measured by whether the plans we devise succeed and produce the results we envisioned.

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<sup>152</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 57. Bauckham sees this principle in the life of God’s people before Christ: “In order for the nations to be blessed Israel need only be faithful to YHWH. Her life with YHWH will itself draw the nations to YHWH so that they too may experience his blessing (Gen 18:18-19).” Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 31.

<sup>153</sup> “Christ is at work, in the world, in the Church, in men. He calls men to His side and summons them to take hold in the Christian enterprise. He awakens them to His lordship and makes them partners in His action. . . . His lordship is not limited to those who know and bow to it. There are many who live in the delusion that history is still without Christ. But His lordship is nonetheless over all and He works toward the time when it will be in all. Meanwhile, He calls men into union with Himself.” Smedes, *All Things Made New*, 70.

<sup>154</sup> Prov 16:9.

The success and value of our lives rest wholly in God's hands and in his plan to bring his purpose to its ordained end. "It is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and earth.'... The Spirit transfuses 'into all things his energy' and breathes 'into them essence, life, and movement.'"<sup>155</sup>

*Jesus said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.  
Be confident that I am with you always, to the end of the age."  
Matthew 28:18-20*

*"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."  
Mark 16:15*

The most succinct way to unpack what it means for our lives to engage with the plan of God is to consider what is often called "the Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20), as well as the even more pithy version recorded by Mark (Mark 16:15). The commission, of course, is not a casual recommendation; it is a command that requires obedience.

## Obedience

When it comes to discerning God's will for our lives, and when it comes to understanding the call of God, there are certainly a lot of details shrouded in mystery. But not everything. In fact, a lot of things – possibly even most things – are so clear and straightforward that they hide in plain sight. From the garden, to God's covenant with Abram, to Jesus' preaching, to the pastoral charges of the Prophets and Apostles, one thing

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<sup>155</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 138, in Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 144.

is repeated again and again about how we are to live. We are called to be a holy people.<sup>156</sup> As such, God sets before us his word, his covenant, his holy expectations of how we are to live in the world, with one another, and before him. “Hate evil, love God, and establish justice in the gate.”<sup>157</sup> And our response is to be the same as God’s people of old, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”<sup>158</sup> “Answering the call by its very nature is a stepping forward into responsibility. Responsibility is obedience by another name. . . . But we are not responsible to our calling. We are responsible to God, and our calling is where we exercise that responsibility.”<sup>159</sup>

God’s will is spelled out explicitly, glowingly, and formidably in the Law. Faithfulness to the covenant brings joy and richness of life, but violations of the Law can result in death. There are even biblical stories that document the fatal consequences of getting it wrong,<sup>160</sup> of disobeying,<sup>161</sup> and of trusting good intentions.<sup>162</sup> So, it is completely understandable that some Christians become terrorized, confused, and immobilized amid the anguish of their efforts to discern God’s will and get it right. Some Christians have been taught that they must “hit the mark” or else they, too, will “fall short” of God’s glory.<sup>163</sup> Yet, without taking any of the edge off the seriousness of obedience, we must view that obedience through the lens of the gospel.

How do we know that God takes our sin and disobedience seriously? He sends Jesus to the cross to receive the justice we deserve. He does not spare him, but brings the full weight

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<sup>156</sup> Exod 19:6; Deut 7:6; Isa 62:12; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:9.

<sup>157</sup> Amos 5:15.

<sup>158</sup> Exod 19:8.

<sup>159</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 93.

<sup>160</sup> Num 3:4.

<sup>161</sup> Acts 5:3-11.

<sup>162</sup> 2 Sam 6:6-7.

<sup>163</sup> Rom 3:23.

of the Law down upon him to crush him under the boot of his justice.<sup>164</sup> It is good for us to let our minds linger long on the suffering of Christ, because such a vivid memory sears into our consciousness that “in my place condemned he stood. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!”<sup>165</sup> God takes our sin more seriously than we will ever know – it is an offense beyond our ability to comprehend. But in his mercy he has found a way for the demands of all his holy Law to be fulfilled completely. When Jesus utters that cry from the cross, “It is finished,”<sup>166</sup> there is nothing left undone on our behalf – his work is completed and salvation has been accomplished. All righteousness has been fulfilled – there can be no obedience added to the perfection of Jesus’ life. All justice has been fulfilled – there can be no punishment added to the perfection of Jesus’ sacrifice. It is finished.

Our obedience then, even from the beginning and long before Christ was born, has always been in response to the covering of God’s atoning provision. Righteousness was granted to Abraham by God through faith, so that he might live a holy life.<sup>167</sup> It is no different for us living after Christ, only now we better understand that provision of God in Christ that was only a promise to Abraham.

When God calls us to a way of life, he calls us to Christlikeness, to live out his covenant in holiness. The terms are simple enough for a child to understand. Worship me only, Yahweh says. Do not lie. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not covet. This is the will of God for all people, for all who bear his image. When this is all we know to do today, we may be confident that it is enough to live out the character of Christ as love for God and as love for our neighbors.

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<sup>164</sup> Isa 53:10.

<sup>165</sup> Philip Bliss, “Man of Sorrows.”

<sup>166</sup> John 19:30.

<sup>167</sup> Gen 15:6.

Notice that in Jesus' summary of our covenantal obligations,<sup>168</sup> he places obedience not in the domain of personal piety (more devotion and duty), but in the context of relationships. Holiness and covenantal faithfulness build and strengthens community. Holiness, far from disengaging us from the world, more deeply connects us to God and our neighbors. This relationship-building is essential to the way of life to which God calls all his people. Anything more than basic obedience will be made clear in God's good time as needed and by the gifting of God's Spirit.

### Commission

God's call to obedience and covenantal faithfulness is universal. It is the way of life to which he calls everyone who bears his image. However, to his gathered people he gives a commission, a call to a way of life as the church. These are Jesus' words to the Apostles and to us at the conclusion of his earthly ministry. It is a commission that, I believe, profoundly echoes the call given to God's image bearers in the garden. Notice the parallel between Yahweh's commission at creation and Jesus' commission to us.

The Creation Commission	The Church's Commission	The Continuing Commission
Be fruitful	Go to the whole creation	Fill the world
Have dominion	Make disciples	Extend the Kingdom
Work	Baptize	Be culture-makers
Keep	Teach	Be faithful stewards

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<sup>168</sup> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:37-40).

If this parallel is indeed a faithful illumination of the calling of God, then the answer of what we are to do with our lives begins to come sufficiently into focus. We realize that Yahweh wants us to continue doing what he has called and created us to do from the beginning.<sup>169</sup> Now, clearly a lot has changed between then and now. Sin has played havoc with the world so that it makes doing our work much more difficult. However, the continuing creation commission now has a redemptive character so that our work of culture-making and stewardship have an inseparable counterpart in God's work of redemption that he is bringing to the world through his people because of Christ.

Through his people. Does that fit into your thinking about how God's will is accomplished in the world and in history? It should. In fact, the way God acts in redemption follows the pattern of how he acts in creation.

Think for a moment of the song of creation in Genesis 1. It opens with that bold and dramatic summary statement: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."<sup>170</sup> But as we read carefully what we are told about God's creative actions, we observe that he acts creatively in three ways. He creates by decree, by design, and by delegation.

### Decree

Before there was anything, there was nothing outside of God. The material universe has a starting point before which was only God. Then God decreed. He spoke and the matter of the universe came into existence. He created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. This is raw omnipotence, God on display doing what only God can do in truly unfettered freedom. When we witness the miracles of Jesus we are seeing the same power of divine decree that

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<sup>169</sup> "The mandate of Creation is central to who Christians are before God." Hunter, *To Change the World*, 93.

<sup>170</sup> Gen 1:1.

brought the world into being. When Jesus raises the dead, he gives life where there was no life. When he multiplies the bread and fish, he produces bread and fish that did not exist before his blessing. When he walks on the water and tells the winds and the waves to “shut up,” he overrules by his greater power the design of the created order. God decrees and the universe must obey.

### Design

Once God had brought matter into existence, he demonstrated a second kind of creative action. He organizes what he had caused to be. He separates light and darkness, earth from sky, sea from land. In a larger sense, God is putting to work the properties of what he had created to bring about greater order. This is more than God’s sorting through a giant pile of Legos to rearrange the pieces. But having invested operational properties and principles in the things he had brought into existence, he arranges them so that, for instance, light can function as light, water as water, and so on. These are the elemental second causes referred to in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* on the providence of God.<sup>171</sup> God creates through what he has made the world to be. Light being light and water being water further the creative action of God. He has set the world in motion, and its movement is now a part of his creative design.

His law he enforces: the stars in their courses,  
The sun in its orbit, obediently shine.  
The hills and the mountains, the rivers and fountains,

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<sup>171</sup> “Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.” *The Westminster Confession of Faith* V.ii, no author/editor, *Trinity Hymnal* (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 851.

The deeps of the ocean proclaim him divine.<sup>172</sup>

When trees bloom and give fruit for food, God is at work. So, too, when the wind blows the pollen from that same tree and carries it under our noses, to tickle and stir up our allergies. When rivers flow bringing us water to drink, God is at work. So, too, when the floods swell the streams over their banks to wash away homes and farms.

Isaiah 28:24-29 says, “When a farmer plows for planting” and “has leveled the surface... does he not plant when in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way.... All this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.” Isaiah is teaching that anyone who becomes a skillful farmer *is being taught by God*.<sup>173</sup>

As all created things unfold according to their nature, God is at work.<sup>174</sup>

### Delegation

When God created his image bearers, he invests them with his God-like power and imagination to be creators in his image. Before he rests from his work of creation he includes in his creative activity the delegation of royal responsibility to his image bearers. To them is entrusted creativity and stewardship, to hold on to those things that should not change but at the same time to engage in every legitimate kind of culture-making imaginable. Adam and Eve are in essence charged to make a City of the Garden, a city and a civilization that is graced by all the artistry, industry, and wisdom they can muster. To them God delegates the work of creation that will never end.

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<sup>172</sup> Katherine K. Davis “Let All Things Now Living,” (1939), <http://www.hymnary.org> (accessed Feb 02, 2013).

<sup>173</sup> Keller, “Vocation,” 2.

<sup>174</sup> As God covenanted with Noah, “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night,” all the natural operations of the universe would be God at work, God’s demonstration of his control and character (Gen 8:22).



As we consider the work of God in redemption, we see his creativity expressed in the very same way as in the creation. He *decrees*. In giving us new life, he commands life from death and he sovereignly brings into existence that which was not. He *designs* or mediates. He uses means and works through the whole created order to reveal salvation to the world. He *delegates*. He charges us to go and build a city<sup>175</sup> made without hands as we employ all our artistry, industry, and wisdom to proclaim the glory, truth, and love of God to the world.

The work of our lives has been entrusted to us before we were born. We are to be good stewards of that trust, and we are to pursue with creative freedom all the ways that work can be done well. When Jesus unhorsed Saul, and gave him new life and identity, he entrusted him with the gospel. "I have work for him to do," Jesus assured the trembling Ananias. "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."<sup>176</sup> All who have been called to God have been "given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God."<sup>177</sup> All who have been called to God have been "anointed by the Holy One,"<sup>178</sup> dedicated to royal service, and "entrusted with the gospel."<sup>179</sup> This great treasure, this priceless honor and gift, has not been bestowed upon us because of human accomplishment or accolade, but because we belong to God and are joined to Christ. He has entrusted this treasure to "jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."<sup>180</sup>

But go we must, for he sends us as "ambassadors for Christ."<sup>181</sup> He sends us as a nation of priests sent to bring the message and hope of reconciliation with God<sup>182</sup> through an

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<sup>175</sup> Heb 11:10, 16.

<sup>176</sup> Acts 9:15.

<sup>177</sup> Luke 8:10.

<sup>178</sup> 1 John 2:20.

<sup>179</sup> Gal 2:7.

<sup>180</sup> 2 Cor 4:7.

<sup>181</sup> 2 Cor 5:20.

<sup>182</sup> Exod 19:5; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.

embodied way of life. This truth mobilized the Reformation, reshaping how God's people were to live in the world. The Reformation's reclamation of "the priesthood of all believers" did not make everyone into church workers; rather, it turned every kind of work into a sacred calling."<sup>183</sup>

God has called us to a way of life, and he has called us into his creative and redemptive plan by entrusting to us the work for which Christ gave his life. How then do we understand that sacred honor he has delegated to us? We come back to the commission of Jesus where, I believe, we most clearly learn the answer to our question: What does God want me to do with my life?<sup>184</sup>

There are four parts to Jesus' commission framed by two promises between which we live the whole of our lives:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

We respond to and pursue God's call, we engage in culture-making and stewardship in every area of life, and we give ourselves to the work of creation and redemption in the burly grasp of these two mighty and magnificent promises. In all we do and in all we think and speak in every moment of joy and terror, peace and sorrow, we live in the grip of God's power and presence. These are the great unshakable certainties, the two poles of life between which we experience all the uncertainties and chaotic upheaval of life alongside all the glory of God's presence and first tastes of life in the world made new. Each of these promises is worthy of long and luxurious meditation, but for our purposes here, I will press on to the substance of Jesus' commission: *go, make disciples, baptize, teach.*

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<sup>183</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 19.

<sup>184</sup> I am greatly indebted to Jack Miller and *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* for this understanding of Jesus' commission.

## Go

When I hear this simple command, it reminds me of my mother shooing me out of the house when I had created too much mischief under her feet. “Go, just get out of the house and get out of my hair. Go anywhere but here.” Well, Jesus is certainly not fed up with us when he says “Go” (remember, he has promised to accompany us wherever we go). He is clearly sending us out into the whole world. As in Jesus’ parable of the sower scattering the seed of the word, so Jesus’ “go” scatters us onto every imaginable kind of soil.

This simple command lit a fire under the modern missionary movement as access to the world became more and more possible over the past few centuries. It seems simple enough as a geographic mandate: go to the four corners of the earth, to wherever there are people. Those who have grown up in a missions-minded church family have almost certainly seen a missions map on a wall, perhaps with pins punctuating the map as ways of saying: The gospel has gone here and here and here. It is right and good to think geographically about Jesus’ command. We are to perform our work and we are to take our gifts to every tribe and tongue and nation.

However, Mark’s very brief restatement of the commission adds some valuable detail. He also says, “Proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”<sup>185</sup> His words echo those of Yahweh in the song of creation: “Be fruitful and fill the earth.” The extravagant images of stars and sand given to Abraham depict the enormity and immensity of God’s determination to fill the earth by bringing salvation to the whole world.

There is a not only a geographic dimension to Jesus’ commission, but also a social or cultural dimension. Fulfilling Jesus’ command to go means that we are to be present in every

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<sup>185</sup> Mark 16:15.

*area* of culture. We are to go to the sciences and the arts, to agriculture and medicine, to home-making and management, to dish-washing and dock-loading, to assembly-line labor and engineering, to writing and dancing. We are to be present in every area of life with those who have little and those who have much, with the weak as well as the powerful, to the lovely as well as the despised, neglecting none.

“Amos probably surprised his listeners by insisting that God was actually more interested in what happened ‘in the gates’ than in the sanctuary.”<sup>186</sup> That is, God is more interested in how we live out the faith we profess “in the gates” – in the city center and the seat of commerce, justice, and government. Our gifts entrusted to us by God give us entrance into each of these domains so that we may serve not only with purpose, but also with joy and fulfillment, humility and love. God’s people are to be everywhere because the kingdom of God knows no borders or boundaries.

One of the great joys in the Christian life is discovering that God has already stationed his people in unexpected places. How often do we worry about being a trailblazer (or, more likely a sacrificial lamb) charting new territory for the gospel, and then we discover God has gone before us. His people, our brothers and sisters, are already present and at work. I used to despair over what often seems to be a shamelessly secular and unchecked bias in the national media until I learned of God’s faithful servants at work in radio, television, web, and print journalism. Of course, holiness and stewardship inform our freedom, but there is hardly anything we cannot do or anywhere we cannot go in service to our call, in pursuit of the work of creation and redemption.

*Go* also has a deeply personal dimension. We are to be present in every area of life, even as our Saviour is present in the full breadth and depth of human experience. I will never

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<sup>186</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 224.

forget, in a moment of great heartache and sadness when I was in college, being comforted beyond understanding upon reading the words of Isaiah anticipating the life of Jesus: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”<sup>187</sup> While Jesus sends Paul to be present in the lives of kings and the royalty of the world, Jesus also reminds us that he is present in the lives of the prisoner and the outcast. When we visit the lonely, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the prisoner. . . “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me,”<sup>188</sup> Jesus says. The Great Shepherd is present with us not only in green pastures and by quiet streams, but also in the darkest valleys of death and despair.<sup>189</sup> Even God’s anger and anguish over sin and the effects of sin<sup>190</sup> reveal his presence in our lives. Truly, he is Immanuel, God with us.<sup>191</sup> No less are we to be present in the lives of our neighbors and all whom God has placed in our lives. The Spirit of God – the Spirit of love, mercy, truth, compassion, gentleness, kindness, joy, and peace – sends us to the sorrow, joy, despair, loneliness, anger, light, injustice, and darkness of life to bring the good news of creation and redemption to the whole world.<sup>192</sup> Many times we bear that good news simply by our presence. We are called to announce: God is here.

### Make Disciples

Disciple-making is royal work that takes the *shalom* of the one true king beyond the borders and boundaries of where he is currently given love and allegiance. As Jesus

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<sup>187</sup> Isa 53:4.

<sup>188</sup> Matt 25:40.

<sup>189</sup> Ps 23.

<sup>190</sup> Gen 6:5.

<sup>191</sup> Matt 1:23.

<sup>192</sup> The whole gospel is both good and bad news. The same spirit of God calls us to announce his anger at unrighteousness, idolatry, and rebellion and to stand against the evil and injustice of our day. But we are messengers, not judges, and we are always to deliver the bad news of the gospel in love and always with the hope of the good news.

approached the twelve disciples in the nets and numbers of everyday life, he invited and commanded them with two words: “Follow me.” That is the summons that echoes through the whole of human history. What Yahweh said to Abraham in Ur, he said to Isaiah in the glory of worship, he said to the child Samuel in his dreams, he said to the thousands at Pentecost who heard the call to “repent and believe,” and he said to you and me when we first believed: “Follow me.”

Following Jesus is learning to live in the upside down (or so it seems to us) kingdom of God in which less is more, weakness is strength, and lowliness is greatness. “Do you want to find your life?” Jesus asks.<sup>193</sup> Then you must “lose it,” or (even better) give it to someone else. Life in the kingdom of God requires submitting our lives to our Lord’s kingly rule, loving his law, and devoting our lives to his glory. Coming to a moment of repentance and belief in the gospel is only the beginning of a whole new way of life and a reoriented way of looking at the world.

After the resurrection, Jesus tells Peter that his life will not always be in his control. Peter will discover that he will be taken places that he did not plan to go or places he did not want to go. But Jesus urges Peter to keep before him this question: “Do you love me....Do you love me....Do you love me? Then keep tending my sheep. Above all, keep doing what you have been doing since the day we first met: Follow me, and teach others to follow me, too.”<sup>194</sup>

In this life-long process we learn to bring every thought captive to the truth of God’s word<sup>195</sup> so that all of life becomes the “obedience of faith”<sup>196</sup> grounded in the gospel. As the exercise of dominion entails working and keeping, so the enterprise of disciple-making

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<sup>193</sup> Matt 16:35.

<sup>194</sup> John 21:15-19.

<sup>195</sup> 2 Cor 10:5.

<sup>196</sup> Rom 1:6; 16:26.

involves baptizing and teaching to make the lordship of Christ a visible reality in the community of those who bow their lives before Jesus on his throne.

## Baptize

Covenant theology understands baptism to be the Christ-refined expression of the sacrament of circumcision in the first covenant. Identity with and relationship to God in the world begins at birth. As circumcision marked males and their families as belonging to God, so baptism places all our newborn children into the family of God and into the womb of the Church in anticipation of second birth. Circumcision was never a substitute for faith and repentance, and neither is baptism.

Baptism, then, is the first step in the process of life-long disciple-making. Because baptism is an act of incorporation and immersion into community, it is also an act of culture-making. Baptism as a sacrament assumes the existence and influence of a community known as the Church. In this community, all the graces of God that normally nurture the beginning and development of faith are within reach of all its members. In this community, the creational and redemptive purpose of God shape how we teach one another how our lives are to be lived for his glory and as his grace for the common good. Through baptism we begin to learn what it means to be called to God and called into the world. Through incorporation into the community of grace we begin to see what God is doing in the world and how history is moving toward the consummation. When the Church is mature and healthy as a community, we find in her communion protection from idolatry, isolation, indifference, and injustice. In her fellowship we learn what it means to love the world and to be good stewards of creation and redemption.

Baptism plunges us into experimental learning and the relational knock-about of life in the kingdom of God. To play on the water metaphor, being baptized is like being a drop of water dripped into Lake Mead, the colossal reservoir held in place by Hoover Dam. The lake water, including that one tiny droplet, will eventually crash down to form the headwaters of the Colorado River, the great agricultural life stream of the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico. Before that water comes to rest, it will branch out into countless smaller rivers and tributaries, even arriving as a tiny gentle drizzle delivered to the tender shoots of seedling crops. There is no way of knowing what will come of that one droplet immersed into the immense reservoir, and there is no way to know where it will end up. But of this we can be sure. It was incorporated into the larger body to be sent, to be distributed as far as gravity and engineering will carry it to bring life to dry ground and thirsty plants. How very like the church is this life-giving reservoir through which those called by God are sent to bear the grace of creation and redemption.

### Teach

Amid the experiential ambiguities and uncertainties of life, the community of grace holds before us the promises of God and the truth of his word. Freedom in life and in the use of our gifts comes from knowing God. Jesus' commission is to nurture a community in which we come to know God as Father, Son, and Spirit. While the work of culture-making is the stuff of fertile imagination and creative impetuosity, the call of God is to earth all our culture-making in the knowledge of God.

This is what the Lord says:

“Do not let those who are wise boast in their wisdom;  
Do not let those who are mighty boast in their might;  
Do not let not those who are rich boast in their riches;



But if you boast, boast that you understand and know me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. In these things I delight,” declares the Lord.<sup>197</sup>

Our calling in word and deed, in every circumstance and location of life, is to make God known: Father, Son, and Spirit.

The urgency of the need for the *shalom* of God to capture the hearts of people who live in ignorance and rebellion of God often deceives us into thinking that busyness is better than study, that action is more necessary than devotion. But urgency that is untethered from truth will at best be vanity, nothing, dust in the wind and at worst be selfishness and idolatry.

As we have been commissioned to be caretakers of the earth, committed to its flourishing and preservation, so we have been commissioned to be stewards of God’s truth, working against that sort of erosion that muddies its clarity and authority. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”<sup>198</sup>

What does this principle look like in the history of God’s people? Where do we see the community of grace bringing the good news of creation and redemption to the world? We can find no better example than in God’s command to his people living in the exile of Babylon. Just as we find ourselves living in exile far from our true home, God’s people then could have approached their situation in a variety of ways, much like we do today. We say things like:

God is being cruel, and until he’s nice to us, we’re not going to pay attention to him.  
God has abandoned us, and we have no reason to hope in his power or promises.  
We have failed so miserably that we will never see redemption and restoration.  
We used to think God was powerful, but clearly he’s not as powerful as our enemies;  
otherwise he would have protected us. Maybe we should worship another god.  
We have been victimized and abused by these people who have conquered and defeated us, so we are going to return to them the hatred that they deserve.

Note what Yahweh says through the prophet Jeremiah to his people in exile.

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<sup>197</sup> Jer 9:23-24.

<sup>198</sup> Isa 40:8.

This is what the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”<sup>199</sup>

God wants us to know this truth: We are in exile because of sin *and* because of providence. To separate the two parts of this one truth is to distort our understanding of God and his call. To say that our circumstances are nothing more than the cause and effect of life is to deny God’s presence and providence. To say that our circumstances are nothing more than God’s decree is to turn the world and our lives into an impersonal and fatalistic machine.

God wants us to be culture-makers where he has placed us, and as John Yates preaches, “God has called us to Babylon.”<sup>200</sup> Not only are we to attend to those things that cause our own families to flourish, but we are actively and joyfully to pursue the common good – it is for this reason the Spirit has entrusted his many gifts to the members of the body.<sup>201</sup> As “Basil of Caesarea observes in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, creation possesses nothing – no power, no motivation, or ingenuity needed for work – that it did not receive from the Spirit of God.”<sup>202</sup> The same is true of the Body of Christ in its culture-making.

But this is no mere humanitarian enterprise – it is work to be joined with prayer with a single purpose of incarnating God’s creational and redemptive grace. We are to love seeing the city flourish, and we are to believe that our love for the world and the city accomplishes the purpose for which God called us to himself.

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<sup>199</sup> Jer 29:4-7.

<sup>200</sup> Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 153.

<sup>201</sup> 1 Cor 12:7.

<sup>202</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118.

Consider how Paul explains Jesus' commission in Romans 12. He has just wrapped up eleven chapters of some of the most eloquent and erudite theology in all the New Testament. He makes the transition from formal to applied theology with that magisterial summary cited earlier: "All things are from him, and through him, and to him."<sup>203</sup> Now he turns to the spiritual service of worship,<sup>204</sup> or in Luther's words, "Life in the world oriented toward God."<sup>205</sup> That is, the life of worship and culture-making empowered and motivated by the gifting of the Spirit of God.

Note how he addresses our commission, the work and the life to which we have been called both personally and corporately as the community of grace:

In one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. Therefore, though many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:

- if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;
- if service, in our serving;
- the one who teaches, in teaching;
- the one who exhorts, in exhortation;
- the one who contributes, in generosity;
- the one who leads, with zeal;
- the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit, and serve the Lord.<sup>206</sup>

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

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<sup>203</sup> Rom 11:36.

<sup>204</sup> Rom 12:1-2.

<sup>205</sup> "A central task of the institutional church is to inspire a piety that sees all of life in relation to God." Schuurman, *Vocation*, Location 839, Kindle.

<sup>206</sup> That is, remember that all these things, which may not appear to be sacred tasks, are indeed service to the Lord. Regard them as such. "It is not only a prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty. To go to communion worthily gives God great glory, but a man with a dungfork in his hand, a woman with a sloppail, give him glory too. He is so great that all things give him glory if you mean they should." Gerard Manley Hopkins in Plantinga, *Engaging*, 38.

Live in harmony with one another.  
Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.  
Never be wise in your own sight.  
Repay no one evil for evil but do what is honorable in the sight of all.  
If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.  
Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,  
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is  
hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."  
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>207</sup>

## Conclusion

We have travelled quite a distance from our initial question: "What does God want me to do with my life?" There is no more simple yet comprehensive answer than: Love the Lord your God with your whole being. With my thoughts, my affections, and my will – my whole person – I confess love, loyalty, and worship to the God who has called me to himself. By his grace I learn day by day what it means to live out this whole-hearted devotion and to give up my idolatry to other gods and lesser loves. But this supreme loyalty to God calls me to give my life away out of love not only for him, but also for all that he has made and those whom he has brought into my life. My love for God finds expression in all that I do – in my desire for holiness and obedience, in my stewardship of creation, and in my relationships with my neighbors.

To live in communion with God means that he is in communion with me. His presence imbues all that I am and all that I do. Consequently, before I put too much emphasis on doing, I need to rest in being. He is present with me and is in all I do. This is not passivity, but context, the environment in which I work.<sup>208</sup> I work in company with the triune God, a

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<sup>207</sup> Rom 12:4-21. I have paraphrased the ESV translation slightly to highlight the parallelism within the text.

<sup>208</sup> It is important to recognize that the idea of faithful presence is more a description than a definition. Faithful presence does not prescribe a method of cultural engagement. The term may suggest a quiet

presence that makes sacred even the most ordinary action of life and a presence that brings into each action the fullness of God's person and power to accomplish his purpose.

To love means that the measure of my life is not in the excellence, quantity, or significance of what I produce. Love is a call to faithfulness, to be faithfully present before God and in all of life. Love is a call to deep trust that God is responsible for the outcome not only of my life but also of the whole of human history. Consider Yahweh's question to Ezekiel in the valley of the bones, bones bleached dry in the scorching heat of the desert sun, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Of course, the far horizon of this question is the completion of his redemptive promise, but the same question can be asked a thousand different ways in our lives: Will this marriage endure? Will I be cured of this cancer? Will my children honor God and flourish? Will this business succeed? Will I marry? Will I find friendship? Will my friends come to faith? Ezekiel answers all of these questions for us: "Oh, Lord God, only you know."<sup>209</sup> The outcome of our work and faithful presence rests in the hands of God. Yet, Yahweh responds to Ezekiel, "Speak." As he said to Jeremiah in Babylon, "Seek, marry, plant," so, he says to us, "Live. Obey. Love. Fill. Create."

No one can fix the true brokenness of the world except God. But we do not despair as if our contributions to his work of creation and redemption are meaningless. We bear his grace and the lived-out good news of the gospel in every part of the world, and we can do that through every legitimate vocation. Through the actions and connections of ordinary life, we

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Anabaptist perseverance, and may imply that the presence of God's faithful ones in the world calls for passivity. But this would be a misunderstanding of the concept. In our historical and cultural moment in post-Christian America, Christians indeed need to give disciplined attention to the patient rebuilding of plausibility structures in which the Christian message can be heard and believed. Yet at the same time, faithfulness to God and neighbor always has in view the possibility of every kind of cultural engagement. Faithful presence may call us to oppose culture (e.g. slavery, injustice), to affirm culture (e.g. achievement, sacrifice), or to transform culture (e.g. laws, institutions, creativity). Rather than specifying one mode of engagement for every person in every situation, faithful presence offers a lens by which we may evaluate which mode of engagement is situationally wise and necessary as we enact the call of God and participate in the *mission Dei*.

<sup>209</sup> Ezek 37:3.

make God's character and the *shalom* of God's kingdom visible, real, palpable. Our calling is to live so as to be seen that Christ might be believed and God worshiped.

To love means that we are called to live in community, preeminently with God, but also with the world and with the body of Christ. In the world of businesses and families, arts and the academy, society and government, farms and laboratories, we are to be eager to make Christ glorious through our demonstration of his mercy and grace for the common good. While of course we want the people we love to be reconciled to God, God also calls us to seek their good and do all we can to help them flourish as his image bearers. In our pursuit of the common good, we must think carefully about the connection between our work and redemption – there is resonance and participation, but our work is not redemptive because we make it so. Only God's Spirit can do that. But in the community of the church, we are to embody a foretaste of life in the kingdom of God, lives transformed and relationships reconciled.

If God has designed for our work to be done in community, then we need to recognize at least three important implications for the way we think about our work as a contribution to the mission of God. Work is always incomplete. Work is always complementary. Work is always dependent.

### Incomplete

I think we all enjoy that feeling of accomplishment when a job is finished. Whether it be balancing the checkbook, cleaning out the garage, or completing a course, we experience satisfaction that the job is done. But in the larger flow of life and in the historic mission of God, our work is never done. We make incremental contributions that sometimes feel like

progress, or we labor to rebuild and regain ground that was lost. The call to disciple-making is life-long. There is always more to learn. The weeds will take over the garden if we stop tending and pruning, and this year's harvest must be hard won again next year. But incompleteness is not failure. Our work is part of a larger whole, the success for which falls upon the shoulders of Jesus. He is the only one who can make people and the world complete. His resurrection is his promise that he will do so and that we will not labor in vain. As we face choices related to God's calling, do our decisions move us toward the hope of what God will complete in Christ?

### Complementary

Life is often like a puzzle, sometimes, with too many missing pieces. God employs us in ways something like a puzzle. He interlocks us in other peoples' lives and plants us in the soil of this world to strengthen the progress of his mission. My life meshes with yours not only to complete the work, but to strengthen the *doing* of the work. More than mere companionship, although that is important, God sows us into the lives of our neighbors and into the stuff of creation. In turn, we invest ourselves in others to make them whole and see creation flourish. The glory of others is our good. Where, then, are the gifts and graces entrusted to me needed most? It should be a high priority for us, instead of being driven by competition, to delight in other people's success. As we face choices related to God's calling, do our decisions in love strengthen the hands and encourage the hearts of those who labor alongside us?

## Dependent

Our work always stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before as well as those alongside us in the present. This means that whatever toolkit we bring to the work of God's calling, there are always tools we need to borrow from someone else's kit. Regardless of how many skills we believe we possess or how much maturity we think we've attained, we always bring tremendous inadequacy to our work. We are always growing. But this deficiency is no sign of failure – it is part of how God has designed us to work. We are to depend upon one another and lean hard on God's provision through others. Nowhere have I felt this need for dependence more keenly than in parenting...a deficiency I discovered with terrifying vividness within twenty minutes of returning home from the hospital after the birth of our first-born son. As we face choices related to God's calling, do our decisions deepen our dependence on the body of Christ and on God's provision and support through those who bear his grace to me in my weakness?

We have given the question about God's calling a new context, and we have reshaped the question to be: "How has God gifted me to contribute to what he is doing in the world?" The answer to the question of calling is found in the united purpose of God in creation and redemption. From the beginning and now in Christ, our calling is four-fold:

1. We are to be present in every part of the world, every part of culture, and every part of life.
2. We are to seek the *shalom* of God by contributing to all things being renewed and restored, changed and healed in relationship to the kingdom of God.



3. We are to draw on the resources of the community of grace as we engage creatively in culture-making both with a love for God and the gospel of reconciliation as well as a love for neighbor and the common good as a foretaste of the world made new.
4. We are to hold onto the truth of who God is as we practice stewardship of all that has been entrusted to us: God's world, God's word, and all who bear God's image.

So, I have two job offers, two university acceptance letters. Which one do I take? How do I know which one comes with the blessing of God's call? The answer resides not in the choice *per se*, but in the environment in which the choice is made. First, I will affirm these boundaries: Can I make this choice out of supreme loyalty to God? Can I make this choice with genuine love for the world and a desire to seek its good? Can I make this choice with a deep connection with the Body of Christ? Can I make this choice with faith hope and love? If the answer is yes, I may choose among the options before me with wisdom and freedom for I will be endeavoring to join my life to the mission of God in Christ. I will be trusting in the divine providence which is bringing his creation toward completion through my work and through our work as those who have been gathered to Christ.

As we understand calling as a commission of creation and redemption, we affirm that all of the varied options presented to us can be faithful and joyful responses to God's calling us to himself. *Soli Deo Gloria*. All of life can be lived to the glory of God and as the communication of his grace for the common good. Here is the rule that the Apostle Paul gave to all the congregations he served: "Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them"<sup>210</sup> Far from resignation or passivity, this is a faith-informed confidence that God is at work in every area of our lives

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<sup>210</sup> 1 Cor 7:17 NIV.

and that he is at work through us in every area of life and culture for the fulfillment of his eternal purpose in creation and redemption.

Here, then, is the work of local congregations: “God gave pastors and teachers to the church in order to equip the saints...in their ministry. And their ministry, the ministry that really counts as mission, is outside the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light”<sup>211</sup> in every area of culture. This is our calling.

## A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

*Every person is defined by the communities she belongs to and the ones she doesn't belong to.*  
Pipo<sup>212</sup>

If community is critical to a biblical understanding and practice of calling, then the hard work needed to renew community must build on the confident belief that community is woven into the fabric of God's work in creation and redemption. But, in current American and Western culture, reorienting our identity within the context of community likely will move us into unfamiliar and even confusing territory. Community pushes against the dominant paradigm of individualism and personal choice. Secular salvation is frequently framed in terms of libertarian autonomy, which easily renders community a threat to personal rights and freedom.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, our sociological habits have influenced our hermeneutical perspective. That is, too many of us have lost the skill of reading the Scriptures as a community, in community, and for community. If we are to recapture a

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<sup>211</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 272.

<sup>212</sup> Orson Scott Card, *Speaker for the Dead* (New York: TOR, 1986), Kindle.

<sup>213</sup> Steve Garber quotes Mark Schwehn, “Epistemologies have ethical implications...ways of knowing are not morally neutral but morally directive.” Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), p. 87.

robust view of calling, we need to appreciate how much of the Bible speaks and thinks in terms of community so that we can ground our work and rest, our identity and purpose, our vocation and calling, in the place God intends us to flourish. This overview aims to affirm the significance of community in biblical theology particularly as it relates to knowing and teaching a biblical understanding of calling in the life of the church.

One of the deficiencies of modern English grammar is that the personal pronouns for the second person (singular and plural) are both *you*. American Southern grammar offers a charming solution by employing *you* for singular and *y'all* for plural as well as the emphatic *all y'all* (to eliminate any possible ambiguity). Similarly, there is the Northeastern alternative, *youse guys*. If the pronoun, *you*, can mean both one and many, the fundamental structure of our language does not do us any favors when we attempt to make a clear distinction between the individual and the community.

Consider this statement, which Jesus made to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have *you*, that he might sift *you* like wheat, but I have prayed for *you* that *your* faith may not fail.”<sup>214</sup> In the English Standard Version translation, the pronouns obscure a powerful and important reality of what Jesus said to Peter (and to us). *You* in verse 31 is plural. *You* in verse 32 is singular. In verse 31 Jesus discloses that Satan wants indiscriminately to ravage the whole flock, all of them (*all y'all*). But in verse 32 Jesus promises that his intercession is personal, by name, for Peter.

What we find challenging to express grammatically, we discover is even more difficult to express socially, in the way we live (or do not live) together. The ancient philosophical tension between the one and the many remains a real part of our lives today, because we have to decide if we are going to live as individuals or as community, independently or in

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<sup>214</sup> Luke 22:31-32, emphasis added.

relationship. The same tension is expressed in the motto of the American political experiment, *e pluribus unum* (out of the many, one).

Modern culture insists, it seems, that we are most fulfilled when we choose the many (the individual) over the one (the community). Relentless are the images and pressures to frame our lives in terms of freedom and self-fulfillment. Lost or weakened are the deep bonds, Tocqueville's "habits of the heart," that ground our identity in membership in a community or fellowship larger than ourselves.

The difficulty we face socially has its roots in our fallenness and in the impact sin has made on the cosmos. To be born in sin is to begin life in alienation.<sup>215</sup> Contrary to the common experience of physical birth, each person is born outside the family of God, detached from the life of God, adrift in the isolation of rebellion against the kingdom of God. Alienation is contra-creation, a spoiling of creational goodness and *shalom*. Fellowship has been broken not only with God and those who bear his image, but also with every element of the cosmos.

Idolatry perpetuates and calcifies that alienation by the worship of gods within the cosmos, and by a refusal to seek reconciliation with the God of the cosmos. But the good news of God's covenant, confirmed by the gospel of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, declares that our wilderness wandering is over – in Christ we have been joined to the triune society of God and to the community of his people now and in the world made new.

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<sup>215</sup> Rom 5:6ff; Eph 2:12.

## Creation

Augustine prayed, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>216</sup> The creator, in triune collaboration, fashioned humans, men and women, as his image bearers. The Psalmist prayerfully marvels at the implications of God’s action: “you have made [us] a little lower than God and crowned [us] with glory and honor.”<sup>217</sup> Essential to the God-likeness of God’s image bearers is that we have been created for community, for society.

We have been created first for communion with God. Certainly the window through which we catch a glimpse of life in Eden reveals a creator intimately delighting in the lives of those who bear his image. We are able to witness an unveiled fellowship that has been absent from life since the Fall. God’s pursuit of his sinful cowering creatures as well as his pronouncement of banishment and judgment make plain that sin results in a loss of communion with God, a loss of the community for which God created us. Thus, one of the most prominent redemptive themes in Scripture is reconciliation, the restoration of relationship and community: “Be reconciled to God.”<sup>218</sup>

We have also been created for human communion, for one another. Cain responds to God’s question about Abel, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>219</sup> This brotherly keeping is that creational responsibility “to keep” (שמר) commanded in Genesis 2:15, a charge to maintain relationship within community. Implicit in the interrogative reply is Cain’s dual rebellion – he refuses his duty toward God in worship, and he refuses his duty toward his brother in love. Similarly, the elder brother in Jesus’ parable of the lost son refuses both to honor his

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<sup>216</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.

<sup>217</sup> Ps 8:5, NRSV.

<sup>218</sup> 1 Cor 5:20; cf. Rom 5:10; Col 1:20.

<sup>219</sup> Gen 4:9.

father and to love his brother, and consequently endures the community celebration as an outsider looking in.<sup>220</sup>

It is “not good”<sup>221</sup> for us to be alone (that is, outside of society). When we blush that our first parents stood in each other’s presence “naked and not ashamed,”<sup>222</sup> we are reminded about the devastation of sin in driving us away from community and one another.

However, community is more than goodness. In the unspoiled creation, social relationships were solemnized by the intentional ratification of communal bonds, pre-eminently the “leave, cleave, and unite” of marital covenant.<sup>223</sup> Community belongs to the cultivated stewardship of creation. We are to pursue community purposefully, and we are to value it as a gift from God as that which displays his image and makes us whole. So, the restlessness about which Augustine prays is resolved ultimately in reconciliation, being restored to the community of God’s being and God’s family.

## **Covenant**

Covenant presupposes community. The bonds affirmed by covenant form the fiber of a tightly knit society. The new community that emerges from the covenant that God established with Abraham both recovers some of the communion that was lost in the Fall and anticipates the inviolable communion that will be established in the consummation. The particularity of God’s choice of Abraham had in view the creation of a nation that will be the means through which God gathers all the nations of the world into the family of God, a global community united in the kingdom of God. Yahweh covenants with Abraham, “In you

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<sup>220</sup> Luke 15:25ff.

<sup>221</sup> Gen 2:18.

<sup>222</sup> Gen 2:25.

<sup>223</sup> Gen 2:24.

all the families of the earth shall be blessed,”<sup>224</sup> a reality made certain in Christ’s resurrection<sup>225</sup> and affirmed in Pentecost.

The covenant community of God is the gathering of God’s people to God himself. Yahweh himself is the very center of this common life in which God surrounds himself with his sons and daughters in whom he takes deep delight.<sup>226</sup> Between deliverance from slavery in Egypt and arrival in the land of promise, God’s people would literally arrange their homes around the presence of Yahweh – three tribes to the north, three to the south, three to the east, and three to the west.<sup>227</sup> This dramatization in the desert anticipates the church of God encircling Christ, the One who walks among the lampstands that depict the gathered community of God’s people.<sup>228</sup> And as Jerusalem was home to the temple, the visible presence of God, so God will make his permanent dwelling upon the earth, a city that gathers its citizens from all the nations of the world.<sup>229</sup>

Life organized around the presence of God is also ordered by God’s presence. Jesus quotes Moses in summarizing the covenant responsibilities of God’s people: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>230</sup>

Love can exist only in community. In fact all of God’s communicable attributes are found only in community. The virtues of godly character are ethical in nature because they are standards of behavior for life lived in relationship with other people. Relationships lived as an extension of communion with God engage us in one another’s lives as the Spirit of

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<sup>224</sup> Gen 12:3

<sup>225</sup> Gal 3:8.

<sup>226</sup> Isa 12:6; Zeph 3:17.

<sup>227</sup> Num 2.

<sup>228</sup> Rev 12:1-20.

<sup>229</sup> Rev 21:3, 24-26.

<sup>230</sup> Matt 22:37-40; cf. Mark 12:30-31; Deut 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 30:6

God furthers the work of Christ among us. Consider some of the ways godly character is lived out in community:

Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.  
Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.  
Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.  
Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.  
Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.  
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.  
Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.  
Contribute to the needs of the saints.  
Seek to show hospitality.  
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.  
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.  
Live in harmony with one another.  
Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.  
Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.  
Comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.  
Convince, rebuke, and encourage with the utmost patience in teaching.  
Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.  
If one has a complaint against another, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.  
Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.  
Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body.  
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.  
Do not quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. [Such] talk will spread like gangrene.<sup>231</sup>

To love God, to be wholly devoted to him and to be his gathered people, means that we must love all who bear his image. To be in relationship with the triune God demands that we cultivate and value human society and that we express God's love to everyone. When Paul

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<sup>231</sup> Eph 4:25-32; Rom 12:10-16; Phil 2:3-4; Jas 5:16; 2 Cor 1:4; 2 Tim 4:2; Col 3:12-16; 2 Tim 2:14, 17.



calls us to offer a particular love to “those who are of the household of faith,”<sup>232</sup> he presupposes a far wider love than embraces all who bear God’s image. To love our neighbor means that we actively extend God’s grace to those in our sphere of influence whether or not they belong to the family of God. The practice of Sabbath calls us to honor those of other cultures and faiths as we have occasion to show hospitality.<sup>233</sup> Our love for and commitment to community should flow naturally from our love for and commitment to God and our desire to be Christ-like.

The sacramental acts of covenant renewal celebrated by God’s people repeatedly press home our identity as a gathered community. Circumcision and baptism inaugurate entrance into the covenant community, the visible assembly of God’s people. As the sacrament of incorporation (both expressions), it establishes belonging and identity as a member of God’s gathered people. Refusal (at least for circumcision) constituted disassociation from and non-membership in the covenant community<sup>234</sup> and therefore a rejection of communion with God.<sup>235</sup>

Paul uses baptismal language to explain the relationship of the entire covenant community to Moses: “all were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”<sup>236</sup> The whole community was identified in one person, Moses. Similarly, the whole of God’s people is now identified by our baptism into Christ.<sup>237</sup> As the whole of humanity has been alienated through Adam and Eve’s sin, so

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<sup>232</sup> Gal 6:10.

<sup>233</sup> Deut 5:14.

<sup>234</sup> Gen 17:14.

<sup>235</sup> Hebrews 6:1-12 likely echoes the sacramental warning of Genesis 17:14 – refusing the covenant grace offered in the community of God’s people places one outside the community in the hard-hearted alienation of unbelief.

<sup>236</sup> 1 Cor 10:1-2.

<sup>237</sup> Rom 6:3-5.

salvation comes to the whole family of God through incorporation into Christ: “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”<sup>238</sup>

The Passover and the Eucharist engage God’s people in the sacrament of atonement. The lamb and the Lamb die so that God’s people may be set free. The community as a whole is liberated *en masse* so that after a wilderness sojourn, God’s people may arrive at the land of promise. Moses, anticipating Christ, “led captivity captive.”<sup>239</sup> Jesus, the greater Moses, declares that he has come to lead an even greater exodus<sup>240</sup> – he has come to liberate his people from slavery forever and capture them by his powerful grace to bring them to their eternal home.<sup>241</sup> It is to a community, “my people,” that God brings salvation.<sup>242</sup> In this redemptive liberation, God regards those he is saving as a united whole, even as a single person: “out of Egypt I called my son.”<sup>243</sup>

It would be easy to think of the community character of incorporation and atonement as merely descriptive. To be sure, the language of gathered covenant community depicts the grand poetic sweep of redemption expressing the great heart of God. The images Yahweh gave to Abraham when he inaugurated the covenant prod our imagination – you will sooner count all the grains of sand on the shore or the stars in the night sky than calculate the enormity of what God is accomplishing by his grace throughout history among all the peoples of the earth.

But the reality is no metaphor. Our failure to recognize and respect what God is accomplishing redemptively in our presence (at our moment in history, whatever that moment happens to be) startles us to attention. We risk God’s displeasure if we are

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<sup>238</sup> 1 Cor 15:22.

<sup>239</sup> Eph 4:8.

<sup>240</sup> Luke 9:31.

<sup>241</sup> 1 Cor 5:1.

<sup>242</sup> Zech 8:8.

<sup>243</sup> Hos 11:1; cf. Matt 2:15.

indifferent to our connection to the body of Christ and our accountability to the covenant community.

Paul gives us a disturbing Eucharistic warning that we will incur judgment if we fail to “discern the body” – many who have done so, he reports, are sick or dead.<sup>244</sup> He has in mind, I am convinced, not a right understanding of the sacramental elements, but a right relationship with the covenant community. Paul is tracing the implications of Jesus’ description of the visible gathered community: “you [*all y’all*] are a lamp set on a pole, a city set on a hill.” Our common life is to be observable so that those who witness our life together, will come to worship the One who is our life.<sup>245</sup> We are to come together as a church, as a congregation and a community. But, as with the Corinthians, we too often come in fractured fragments, cliques, and party factions.<sup>246</sup> If we live without regard for the community – by prejudice and favoritism, by unforgiveness and pride, with self-indulgence or indifference to the needs of the poor, by allowing anger and injustice to languish – we discredit and even disavow the work of the One who has given his life for his people. So important is the credibility of our shared life before a watching world, Jesus says that we are to forgo worship until we seek reconciliation, even in those cases in which we are not the guilty party.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> 1 Cor 11:27-30.

<sup>245</sup> Matt 5:14-16.

<sup>246</sup> 1 Cor 11:18.

<sup>247</sup> Matt 5:23-24.

## Christ

Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, steps onto the soil of human history to enact God's love for the world, the entire cosmos.<sup>248</sup> As the whole earth gives praise to God,<sup>249</sup> so Christ joins himself to the dust of this world so that the whole of creation might be redeemed along with all of those he came to save.<sup>250</sup> Now ascended to the right hand of the Father, Christ sits upon the throne awaiting that moment in history when the whole of creation and all his people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will be united in his holy city forever.<sup>251</sup> This is no piecemeal redemption. Not only will every part (of the whole) be brought to its particular completion, the end for which it was created, but also creation in its entirety will be made whole. This is the restoration of community in the largest possible scale. This is the consummation of all things.

Christ himself, the great community-maker, is known in history by the community formed by those who are "in him" and share his life. The Church is his body, which is "the fullness of him who fills all in all."<sup>252</sup> Christ is present and known in this life by the communion of those who make up his body, the "many members" required to make the body complete. Paul makes the analogy with the physical human body: "Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.<sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks,

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<sup>248</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>249</sup> Ps 19:1, Isa 6:3.

<sup>250</sup> Rom 8:19-23.

<sup>251</sup> Zech 8:8; Eph 1:10; Phil 2:9-11; Rev 21.

<sup>252</sup> Eph 1:3-23.

slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”<sup>253</sup>

The Spirit of Christ then animates each member of the body “for the common good.”<sup>254</sup> “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”<sup>255</sup> The gifts of the Spirit enable the many members to be distinct (individual personality is not lost in the Christ community) and yet coherent. The failure of members to live as a unified whole and as a Spirit-empowered community not only defaces the image of Christ and dishonors the work of Christ in the world,<sup>256</sup> but also debilitates the Body rendering it weak and vulnerable.

The body is only one of several metaphors the Bible employs to identify God’s people as a community. Probably the first metaphor of redemptive community is *family*. It seems that before the sun set on the first day of the newly fallen world, the creator had promised to his alienated image bearers that one would come who would crush the source of evil that had polluted the world. He will be one born of Eve,<sup>257</sup> and he will make things right. Generations later Yahweh promised to give Abraham offspring, a son that will be the beginning of a great family and inheritance. Abraham’s son, Isaac, was spared so that another Son, that is truly Abraham’s flesh and blood yet to be born, might not be spared as the sacrifice for his brothers and sisters.<sup>258</sup> So, it is with deeply paternal empathy that Yahweh responded to his family languishing in Egypt, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people.”<sup>259</sup> The Passover lamb died so that God’s son (Israel) might be set free from the slavery of Egypt.<sup>260</sup> Yet the true Passover lamb was, in fact, the Son who did die so that all his brothers and sisters might

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<sup>253</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-14; cf. Rom 12:4-5.

<sup>254</sup> 1 Cor 12:7.

<sup>255</sup> Rom 15:2.

<sup>256</sup> 1 Cor 6:15-17.

<sup>257</sup> Gen 3:15.

<sup>258</sup> Gen 22:8.

<sup>259</sup> Exod 3:7.

<sup>260</sup> Hos 11:1.

be set free forever. This Son, Jesus, is the firstborn of all creation,<sup>261</sup> so that all who are “in him” and all who “believe in him” might receive “the right to become children of God.”<sup>262</sup> All who are children of God, being “God’s offspring”<sup>263</sup> and God’s family,<sup>264</sup> may pray, “Our Father.”<sup>265</sup>

The family of God is also a *nation*,<sup>266</sup> a *kingdom* whose life is ordered by the law of God,<sup>267</sup> whose allegiance is to the King of Kings and Prince of Peace,<sup>268</sup> and whose citizenship is in heaven.<sup>269</sup> As such we are a community of ambassadors, royal representatives commissioned to speak with authority on behalf of the king.<sup>270</sup> In this kingdom, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus. And if [we] are Christ’s, then [we] are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”<sup>271</sup>

The kingdom of God is a *flock*, sheep who follow their Shepherd<sup>272</sup> who is in turn the Lamb of God who has given his life for the sheep.<sup>273</sup>

The sheep of God are also fruit-bearing *branches* planted in God’s *garden*<sup>274</sup> that draw life from the vine which is Christ.<sup>275</sup> The fruit borne of God’s Spirit<sup>276</sup> is the flowering of his seed planted within us.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Col 1:15, 18.

<sup>262</sup> John 1:12.

<sup>263</sup> Acts 17:29.

<sup>264</sup> Eph 2:19.

<sup>265</sup> Mt 6:9.

<sup>266</sup> 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6.

<sup>267</sup> Ps 1.

<sup>268</sup> Isa 45:23; Phil 2:9-11.

<sup>269</sup> Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20.

<sup>270</sup> 2 Cor 5:20.

<sup>271</sup> Gal 3:28-29.

<sup>272</sup> John 10:1-18; cf. Isa 40:11; Ezek 34:23; Heb 13:20.

<sup>273</sup> Isa 53; Rev 5:12.

<sup>274</sup> Isa 60:21; Jer 2:21; Ps 80:8; 1 Cor 3:9.

<sup>275</sup> John 15:1-11.

<sup>276</sup> Gal 5:22-23.

<sup>277</sup> 1 Pet 1:23.

And, the garden of God is a *building*, a *house* as well as a *temple*, that is the dwelling of God. This building, constructed with living stones that are the saints<sup>278</sup> upon Christ the cornerstone,<sup>279</sup> is the new Holy of Holies, the residence of God upon the earth. We miss the powerful significance of Paul's metaphor when we interpret his identification of the "body" as a "temple" to mean individual human bodies. Here again, English grammar lets us down. Note carefully what Paul says: "Do *you* not know that *your* body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within *you*, whom *you* have from God? *You* are not *your* own, for *you* were bought with a price. So glorify God in *your* body."<sup>280</sup> The pronouns are plural. "Body" is singular as is "temple." One body. One temple. But many are the constituent parts. The body of Christ, comprised of its many members, is a single building.<sup>281</sup> In this sacred edifice, this temple, the Spirit of God takes residence so that wherever the community of God's people is found throughout the world and throughout culture, God is glorified in the midst of that community.

However, the metaphors come full circle when the Apostle Paul identifies the Body of Christ as "the Church."<sup>282</sup> The ἐκκλησία, by definition merely a gathered assembly, is in this case the assembly gathered in identification with Christ. Or, the community that has been gathered to God in Christ by the Spirit. The many-membered Church is a community, a gathered visible congregation distinguished by confession, practice, government, covenant, and ritual. Therefore, we understand that these features that distinguish the community as the church of God belong to and are practiced *in* community.

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<sup>278</sup> 1 Pet 2:5.

<sup>279</sup> Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16, Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:7.

<sup>280</sup> 1 Cor 6:19-20, emphasis added.

<sup>281</sup> I believe that the NIV translators skew the meaning of the text by making *body* and *temple* plural: "Do you not know that your *bodies* are *temples* of the Holy Spirit... Therefore honor God with your *bodies*." (emphasis added)

<sup>282</sup> Col 1:18.

Jesus, in teaching us about the Church, makes a wonderful promise. He said to his disciples (and us), “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”<sup>283</sup> It would be a grave distortion to use Jesus’ statement to justify indifference to Christian community, the Church. Jesus means that it is impossible for the Church to be visible, to be present, apart from community (regardless of size). It would be an utter contradiction for an individual to declare herself to be “the Church” even though that individual may indeed be a genuine member of the body of Christ.

Similarly, the Apostles find it unimaginable for faith to be separate from community. When Peter declares at Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized,” he means that we are to *believe* and *belong*. While he affirms that redemption is undeniably personal (“every one of you”), he places individual conversion within the context of the same redemptive community that Yahweh described to Abraham: “the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”<sup>284</sup>

## Commission

In the beginning, the creator entrusts to his image bearers work, creational responsibility. He charges the whole of the human race to fill, subdue, work, and keep the earth.<sup>285</sup> In the very language of the creational mandate, we see an abundant variety in the way human work can support the mission of God. The divine commission requires creativity, management, identification, knowledge, organization, cultivation, imagination. These differing activities

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<sup>283</sup> Matt 18:20.

<sup>284</sup> Acts 2:38-39.

<sup>285</sup> Gen 1:28; 2:15.



require distinct skills, knowledge, and experience all serve the common cause to glorify God and extend his *shalom*.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!<sup>286</sup>

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word!  
Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!  
Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul!<sup>287</sup>

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his  
handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.  
Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the  
world.<sup>288</sup>

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* affirms that the common cause of all those who bear God's image is, in concert with all creation, to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."<sup>289</sup>

As the history of God's people unfolds east of Eden, we observe God's blessing on every kind of legitimate work possible: agriculture, government, art, architecture, military, writing, parenting, service, public policy, economics, friendship, food, law, and more. Even work related to the public worship of God was varied: speaking, writing, praying, making music and poetry, prophesying, teaching, shepherding, feasting. Yet, regardless of the multifaceted expressions, the whole of life was to be directed to the common cause of creation. The Apostle Paul set this same life-orienting purpose before the newly gathered congregations in Asia and Europe: "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Ps 150:6.

<sup>287</sup> Ps 103:20-22.

<sup>288</sup> Ps 19:1-4 NRSV.

<sup>289</sup> What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, no author/editor, *Trinity Hymnal* (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 869.

<sup>290</sup> 1 Cor 10:31; cf. Col 3:10; 1 Pet 4:11.

One of the frustrating implications of the Fall is that we have lost understanding and awareness of the clear and continuing connection between God's call to invest ourselves fully in the care and development of the creation and his call to glorify him in all we do. Because sin has turned each of us inward, we have corrupted the common calling, which should unify God's people. As a result we search frantically to discover that one personal calling that will enable us to find fulfillment, please God, and recover our significance. But, of course, that is exactly the opposite strategy that Jesus gives us. He asks, "Do you want to find yourself? Then, you must lose yourself."<sup>291</sup>

So, it should not surprise us that in God's providential economy, investing in the creation and seeking God's glory come together in his direction to his people in exile in Babylon. Until we enter our eternal home in the world made new, we ask the same question as God's people living in exile. We will survey our own circumstances and moment in history and ask with the people of Jeremiah's day, "What does it mean to live faithfully in Babylon?" We are dismayed when all around us is idolatrous, when everything we see seems to be the pursuit of everything except God's glory. Here is God's answer: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."<sup>292</sup> Creation and redemption always remain united in the singular purpose of God. Living for the creation means living toward the consummation of creation made clear and certain in the resurrection of the Lord and king of the world made new.

Furthermore, the singular purpose of God unites God's people as the community that furthers his mission. Consider how Jesus taught us to pray, and once again notice the pronouns.

Our Father in heaven,

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<sup>291</sup> Matt 10:39.

<sup>292</sup> Jer 29:7.

May your name be hallowed;  
May your kingdom come;  
May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us the bread we need for today;  
Forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us;  
Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.<sup>293</sup>

If this prayer is in any way a template for all Christian praying, then it is imperative that we recognize how it unites us as the church in gospel mission. First, we pray as God's people to whom salvation in the gospel of Christ, the Son, has come: "Our Father." All prayer begins with the community of God himself and our relationship to his divine society. Martin Luther defined spirituality as "life in this world oriented toward God."<sup>294</sup> So, our community finds its life and purpose in the triune life of God.

Second, the first three petitions express our desire that the mission of God be fulfilled: we pray for people everywhere to believe the gospel and worship God, for Christ to rule in righteousness and peace, and for the Spirit to transform our hearts with love for God. If we reduce these petitions only to matters of personal piety, we completely miss the focus, power, and vision of God's heart for the world and for his people. We are to be united in praying and longing that creation will be completed in the redemption of God in Christ.

Third, the second three petitions have to do with our engagement in that mission, in the gospel: we need provision for the work entrusted to us, we need to be reconciled with one another and thereby demonstrate the truth of the gospel, and we need protection from sin and Satan, which are actively doing their best to undermine the gospel and the mission of God.

With this unifying prayer of gospel mission upon our lips and in our hearts, we come now to Jesus' commission. As he is about to return to the Father, he charges his people to

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<sup>293</sup> This is my own paraphrase structured to highlight the parallels in the several petitions.

<sup>294</sup> McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change*, 33.

focus on the mission, the common cause that mobilizes us as a gospel community. It is a charge given to the entire church, to the whole community, to every member of the body, to every sheep in the flock, to every stone in the building. We will certainly contribute to this mission in ways that express our created personalities and the Spirit's gifting, but this is the calling that Christ has set before us as a community: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."<sup>295</sup> *Make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you."<sup>296</sup>

Christ's commission summons us to community on both a grand global scale as well as locally and congregationally. To take the gospel to the whole of creation and every area of culture certainly requires the unity of "one holy, catholic church" as the Apostles Creed affirms. This is a mission to extend the community of the triune God, the society of God (Father, Son, and Spirit) establishing community with himself throughout the breadth of creation. At the same time, baptism requires the very personal engagement with a local fellowship and pastoral oversight. Plus, this mission keeps in view those who labor vocationally within the structure of the visible church and those who labor elsewhere, a distinction made necessary by the charge to baptize (a sacramental action normally understood to be administered by those who formally hold office in the organized church). The task of disciple-making encompasses the whole of life: baptism expands the community and teaching guides and nurtures the community to spiritual and chronological maturity. Christ is calling us to be a gospel community that is engaged with people in every area and at every stage of life.

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<sup>295</sup> Mk 16:15.

<sup>296</sup> Matt 28:19-20, emphasis added.

Paul affirms his commitment to the common mission of the body when he describes his contribution to the work of the gospel in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one.”<sup>297</sup> Similarly, we can say: Those who feed the hungry, and those who sweep streets, and those who build buildings, and those who teach Sunday School are one.

### **Consummation**

Implicit in the call of God to community, the gathering of God’s people in this world, is the promise that he is gathering people from every tribe and tongue and nation throughout the whole of history to himself in the world made new. The whole creation will be purified and made fit for the dwelling of God among his people forever. Everything the community of God’s people enacts in this life should anticipate and confirm the *shalom* of God in the new creation. And, our hope in the consummation, far from disengaging us from this present life, becomes the reason for even greater joy and selflessness in our work today. Living in the certainty of God’s promise, the reality of the resurrection, obliterates any separation we might be tempted to make between hope and work. The Apostle Peter writes to many who will soon face death as martyrs, whose days are numbered: “Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.” And at the same time, he says, be fully engaged in life: Prepare your minds – keep thinking and learning. Be alert – be wide awake to what is going on around you. Discipline yourself – focus your life on what is most important and learn to live with godly character. Hope in grace – live with both

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<sup>297</sup> 1 Cor 3:6-8.

humility and boldness knowing that the outcome of your life is what God by his Spirit for Christ's sake is accomplishing by his grace.<sup>298</sup>

## Conclusion

The work of God from creation to consummation is a grand community-building enterprise, from the city looked for by Abraham to the new Jerusalem. It is a community whose builder, center, and foundation is God. As God's eternal being cannot be reduced to a single person, neither can his presence in the world be visible outside of community. Nor is his purpose in the world to be accomplished apart from community.

Being created for community means that we are always to live in the presence of the other – of God, of fellow image bearers, of brothers and sisters in Christ, of the creation itself.<sup>299</sup> Our individual meaning and significance, therefore, is found in love for and service to God, and then necessarily in relationship with everyone and everything else. But we move toward relationship and community from alienation. We begin our lives as strangers to God, and unless we are reconciled to him, we will also live our lives ultimately as strangers to one another with no truly indissoluble bond of community. Reconciliation to God by grace, then, becomes not only our motivation and hope for engagement with all of life, but also the restored relational context within which we cultivate a community that furthers God's mission in response to God's call.

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<sup>298</sup> 1 Pet 1:13.

<sup>299</sup> "To be human is to be in proper relationship with God, other people, and the world." Michael Wittmer, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 83.

## Presence

Community is essential to the presence of God in the world and to making him known in the fullness of his beauty, wisdom, and glory. Together, God's gathered people make Christ visible, understandable, desirable, and accessible. The creedal confessions are both catholic and Christological in affirming that we are "one, holy, apostolic" church. When the covenantal elements of the Eucharist are held before the people of God, we hear the words, "This is my body." To apply the meaning of those words only to the elements themselves diminishes the truth and reality of the sacrament and the mission of God. Those words declare that the body of Christ is the whole assembly gathered to Christ publicly professing faith in the gospel, the fruit of God's gracious work in the world. Christ is incarnate. There can be no Christ without a body and there can be no body without being animated by the Spirit of Christ. Thus, as the community of grace we dare to say, "Christ is here" and we dare to invite the world, "Come and see."

When the presence of God informs community we ask of ourselves: "Are there any impediments in the way we live together and live in this place that obscures or contradicts the character and truth of God? Which of God's virtues need to be most visible to all who know us?"

## Mission

Community is essential to the mission of God, and the community is as diverse as the mission. As the Apostle Paul teases out the analogy of the body, he reminds us that some of

us are eyes, others ears, yet others hands and feet. Each is distinct and necessary, yet each is connected and dependent (a weakness that finds strength and completion in community).

Since the church and local congregations are a part of culture, they are organizations with members gifted for a variety of service and with structure that includes positions of support and leadership. While the structure of the church conforms to God's direction and design, the variations in service among individual members constitute practical distinctions, not essential differences. As Paul says to Philemon (the employer) about Onesimus (the employee) in another cultural context, "Treat him as a beloved brother in Christ. Receive him as you would receive me."<sup>300</sup>

In spite of the claims of much biographical hagiography, no one person shoulders the weight of what God is doing in any place or at any time. No one person serves the mission of God as a Marvel Comic superhero or as an autonomous agent. Each of us should cultivate an awareness that we are rarely if ever God's solo worker in any location or vocation – there are brothers and sisters with us in our area of work, and there are others contributing differently to our vocation as they have been distinctly gifted. Even where Christians labor in isolation, they serve as representatives and as extensions of the community as well as for the furtherance of the community. Because the mission is ultimately about God's work in the world, we also must help each other recognize that God extends his grace through those who do not know him – for these people and their contributions we should learn to give genuine thanks.

When mission informs the community, we ask questions like: "Where are those unmet areas of need in our city to which we together can focus our service? How can we as a congregation more effectively equip or encourage those among us who are in a particularly

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<sup>300</sup> Phlm 1:16-17.



challenging vocation? In what ways can we as a community speak and live so that Christ is revealed and proclaimed with greater grace and truth? How can we help one another practice faithful presence in every area of life, particularly with those responsibilities that are not obviously redemptive? How can I encourage leaders to lead well and supporters to support well? How can we better demonstrate the catholicity of the body of Christ?”

### Maturity

Community is essential to the gospel and the never-ending work of discipleship. Sin dogs us through the whole of life until God forever rids the world of sin. Along the way we are to help each other disentangle our minds, wills, and affections from the pernicious seduction of sin. Sin is always against the other. It is rebellion against God that produces hatred of neighbor and destruction of the world. It is violence against every dimension of community. Therefore, in gospel community we hope that the light of grace will expose the true character and impact of sin that is often hidden from our independent and self-justifying self-examination. But the community that exposes our sin also brings God’s grace, and it applies it to every area for our growth and maturity. In so doing, we help one another to greater and greater glory, to completeness as those who bear the image of God and the life of Christ.

We also live with the awareness not only of our personal sin, but also our collective sin. We dare not be naïve about the power of sin to corrupt the community as a whole. Community itself is no insulation from sin – each of us brings sin into community, and sin always has the potential of wreaking havoc on a large scale. Many Christians going with the flow of their respective communities were silent about the evil of Nazism during World War

II, accommodated apartheid in South Africa, and tolerated slavery and racism in the United States. So the Spirit distributes gifts for personal holiness as well as corporate righteousness so that together we resist evil, love righteousness, and conform to Christ. In every way we are the community that is always reforming.

By God's grace-gifting we learn from one another, not only knowledge from one generation to the next, but also the practice of disciplines that shape how we respond to God's call and the way we invest our lives in our work. Parenting in the covenant community is a shared commitment and joy, and the commitment to love by all enriches marital commitments. Navigating thorny ethical dilemmas, sorting out conflicting priorities and responsibilities, discerning when to be silent and when to speak (and how to speak) require a wisdom learned from those who have stumbled and found their way before us. Understanding the truth of God's word and its application to every area of life comes to us both through personal study and attentive listening; private meditation (while important) must not be a substitute for teaching and preaching. Patience and courage in the rhythms of life are often learned by example. We survive weakness and despair through the stability of community.

When maturity is the goal of community, we ask questions such as: "How can I apply and encourage others to apply the gospel in every area of life? How can I encourage those who are struggling with sin and the burden of living in a broken world? Who is able to help me learn in those areas of life in which I need to mature? How can I help others appreciate the way God is at work through them in the mission of God and in the growth of the community? How can we better practice hospitality and incarnation? In what ways can we employ the means of grace and spiritual disciplines to encourage a shared faith that is solid and trustworthy? How can we help one another know and love God more?"

God has created us for community because he made us to be like him and in communion with his triune being. Our work as his image bearers has always been to extend communion with him throughout the whole world. Now that Christ has pitched his tent among us as one of us,<sup>301</sup> he has confirmed beyond doubt that right now he is with us in community forever. He is the Sun, the Tree of Life, the House of God at the center of the eternal city, and today we are his flock, his field, his temple. As we have found our lives made whole in him (“in him we live and move and have our being”<sup>302</sup>) and as we have been united to Christ by the Spirit, so as one body and with one voice we proclaim our love for God and neighbor in every area of culture and every part of creation. “The purpose of God’s call is for the people of God to worship God, and to participate in God’s creative and redemptive purposes for the world, to enjoy, hope for, pray for, and work toward God’s *shalom*. This is what it means for Christians to be in Christ and to follow Christ.”<sup>303</sup> We are God’s gathered people, the nations streaming to Christ, created and redeemed for life in the city of God. Today by grace we give shape to that community for which we are destined, till “earth and Heav’n be one.”<sup>304</sup> It is to Christ the great culture-maker and source of all community that we invite all whom we love: “be reconciled to him” that together we might be united as his people.

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<sup>301</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>302</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>303</sup> Schuurman, *Vocation*, Kindle 262.

<sup>304</sup> Babcock, “This Is My Father’s World.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*What would it look like for a pastor to so understand his vocation that he would be able to pastor people in their vocations, seeing their work as integral to the mission Dei?*

Steven Garber<sup>1</sup>

This project endeavors to evaluate a present-level of understanding among lay Christians about a) the biblical teaching on calling, work, vocation, and mission; b) their own practice of calling, work, and vocation in the context of mission; and c) the relationship of the congregational life of the church to that practice. To assess that understanding, I led a study group (the Faith and Work Forum) during the Fall of 2013 and I conducted a survey with that group. I gave an entry and exit survey to each participant in the Faith and Work Forum (FWF) to attempt to discern any change of understanding, appreciation, or practice as a result of the FWF. I also gave a similar survey (with no reference to the FWF) to a group of people in my personal network as an attempt to gain greater insight into how a wider range of people think about calling, work, and vocation. Additionally, the FWF was an experiment in teaching “faithful presence” with a view to refining how to communicate and apply these ideas of calling, work, vocation, and mission on a regular and integrated basis in the congregational life of New Life Presbyterian Church.

The following documents are appended to this project description:

1. The FWF notebook.

These are the materials given to each participant in the Forum.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014) 156.

2. The FWF intake and outtake survey and responses.
3. The Faith and Work seminar handout.

This handout accompanied the one-hour Faith and Work seminar I presented four times in response to the Faith and Work Forum. The participants in the seminars were non-participants in the Forum.

4. The general Faith and Work survey and responses.

## FAITH AND WORK FORUM

The FWF attracted sixteen participants for a six-week discussion study on the relationship of faith and work. The group represented a helpfully diverse mix of participants. Ages ranged from middle-twenties graduate students to retirees. Gender representation was nearly equal as was marital status (single/married). Vocational representation was diverse including graduate students, blue collar workers, retirees, those beginning their career life, at-home parents, academics, one pastor, and two pastor's wives. Participants expressed a level of satisfaction in their current work that ranged from stable and happy to unstable and unhappy. Most participants expressed significant uncertainty either in the connection between their faith and their vocational decisions or in the relationship between their work and the mission of God. Four local congregations were represented. All but one of the sixteen completed the whole course. Conversation was lively and interest was high. Although the group members understood that they were participating in a research project, they also participated out of strong personal interest in the topic.

The FWF attempted to explore and apply a biblical understanding of God's call to the Christian community in the real-life intersection of faith, work, and mission. The stated goals were:

1. What is "calling"?

Understanding how work is related to the life of faith and the call to follow Christ and pursue the mission of God.

2. How do faith and work complement and conflict?

Learning to be faithful to Christ in the tension of competing loyalties and responsibilities in work, and to celebrate grace present in work.

3. How can the church help you be faithful in your work?

Discovering ways your local congregation can better encourage and equip you for work and the practice of "faithful presence."

The six-week outline for the FWF sessions followed the content of the discussion of calling presented as a part of this project.

1. Called to God

God joins us to Christ and to the mission of Christ in the world.

2. Called to Work

God created us to work and for work to further his creational purposes.

3. Called into the World

God created us for the world, a place of common and special grace.

4. The Intersection of Faith and Work in the World

Seeing grace and working out the conflicts.

5. Called to a Way of Life

God created us to love him and our neighbor in every area of life.

## 6. How the Church Helps Us Practice Faithful Presence

Forming a covenant community that values work as worship.

As a devotional exercise, each FWF session opened with a discussion of five reflection questions which I composed:

1. In what ways have you found joy in your work?
2. In what ways have you cried out for help in your work?
3. In what ways have you seen your work contribute to the flourishing of other people and the creation?
4. In what ways have you seen your work push back against evil, sin, and brokenness?
5. In what ways have you seen your work point to the hope of redemption that is ultimately found in Christ's work?

The discussion of several dimensions of calling moved to identification of real-life areas in which faith and work conflict and are complementary. The FWF concluded with a consideration of ideas about ways that local congregations can encourage Christians to practice "faithful presence."

## FAITH AND WORK SEMINAR

The FWF generated interest among people who were not able to participate in the FWF. I compressed the material on calling into a one-hour introductory seminar which I presented four times to graduate and undergraduate student groups at Cornell University during the Fall of 2013. While the topic of calling is of relentless interest to young adult Christians, the response to the seminar affirmed that both the content and perspective of the seminar was welcome and helpful.

## FAITH AND WORK SURVEYS

I conducted two surveys. The first survey was given to the FWF group in two parts. Part 1 (Intake) was given before the FWF (with 100% participation). Part 2 (Exit) was given at the conclusion of the FWF (with 75% participation). Then, a second General Survey (with questions similar to the FWF survey) was given to 885 personal acquaintances (with 14.35% participation). The FWF group and the General Survey group were mutually exclusive.

## OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Pastoral Affirmation**

Before I committed to this dissertation project, I wanted to test the waters. To do that, I spoke with eight pastors who serve in college communities similar to Ithaca and two pastors who are local colleagues in Ithaca. I asked them several questions, including: Do you agree that my diagnostic assessment of cultural currents that inhibit community formation in local congregations is accurate? If you have read *To Change the World*, do you agree with James Davis Hunter's view of calling that he calls "faithful presence?" How do vocation and calling factor into your vision for your congregation and the mission of the church? Would you welcome help pastorally in encouraging and equipping Christians in the area of vocation and calling?

All the pastors were in agreement with my diagnostic assessment – the currents I note are not at all obscure: transience, depersonalization, biblical illiteracy, and individualism. DB in Durham, NC, encouraged me to include consumerism, as did Marva Dawn in email



correspondence about my thesis topic. Every one recognized individualism as the most pervasive cultural issue that infects the life of the church. With respect to the loss of community, DH in Bloomington, IN, has observed that a fear of being known by others leads to isolation and a lack of transparency, but he concludes that autonomy is just another way of holding onto power. DJ in Palo Alto, CA, emphasized the need for hospitality, giving people room to grow and tell their stories. When it comes to discipleship, he resists what he calls “the didactic fallacy,” which believes that telling is enough. People know they live in a fragmented world, but they don’t know how to live differently – they have to learn together differently to live together differently. Mission and community come together for KS in Princeton, NJ, in the cultivation of informal leaders who are essential to purposeful progress in the life of the church. Mission also informs how the community is led and gathered. MC in New Haven, CT, insists that a missional community must include the poor for whom work and vocation are often less options of opportunity and more burdens of necessity, and those who live with shame and need the healing embrace of community.

Most of the pastors had read Hunter and found his historical critique accurate and his pastoral diagnosis true and helpful – there was solid agreement that his argument for “faithful presence” is sound, wise, and important. Since many of these pastors care for graduate students, the question of calling, vocation, and significance are regular topics of concern and conversation. We all feel the need to impart to those who are beginning their families and careers a missional view of work. While most of the pastors described initial efforts to emphasize vocation and calling in their care for the congregation, most believe they need to do more and would welcome help and ideas to make that happen. Most were strongly affirming that my dissertation project promised to be a resource they would value in

discipleship, outreach, and in shaping congregational life. For this encouragement, I was greatly appreciative.

## **Faith and Work Tensions**

Many conversations about faith and work begin when Christians experience tension between the two. But very quickly we discover that the tensions result from a wide range of ideas and practices that often conflict. Discerning the heart of the conflict becomes a significant first step in knowing how to learn to live with or attempt to resolve the conflict. In the FWF we identified several areas of tension, and I composed discussion starters to open conversation about these areas of conflict.

### **Spiritual vs. Material**

The world is, in every way, polluted by sin. Therefore, it's easy to feel like handling the stuff of the world (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) is un-spiritual or anti-spiritual. We are told in Scripture to live all of life to the glory of God. Yet, it often feels like the material world tainted by sin gets in the way of living for God's glory. Is devoting our work to material things (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) spiritual in character? If it is (or, if it can be), how do we learn to view the material world as spiritual? If creational work is good, what does it mean to value the work for what it is (or, as Dorothy Sayers encourages us, to value the work for the sake of the work)? If creational work is good, how can/should it be informed by Christ's redemptive work and our call to be disciple-makers?<sup>2</sup> How can we

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<sup>2</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

engage in the work of disciple-making without neglecting or devaluing creational work which we are called to do?

### Explicit vs. Implicit

We are called to be disciple-makers. This is the whole-life endeavor of the church as a community that summons and helps people toward maturity in Christ. But, does work that seems (to us) to be more creationally-oriented (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) contribute to the (as it seems to us) more explicitly redemptive work of disciple-making? If it does, to what degree or in what ways should we endeavor to make more creationally-oriented work more explicitly redemptive? Or, how should we endeavor to regard more creationally-oriented work as redemptive? If we find ourselves in situations in which the culture restricts our opportunities to be explicitly redemptive (e.g. employees may not discuss religious beliefs at work), to what degree are we called to be “against culture” by ignoring or opposing those restrictions or trusting God to work even when we are restricted? If God uses all our work redemptively, to what degree should we be content simply to do our work well? How does plumbing, for example, express obedience to the redemption commission?<sup>3</sup> How does preaching, for example, express obedience to the creation commission?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Gen 1-2.

## Gifts vs. Responsibility

We are all gifted by God in personal ways, and we acknowledge that the receipt of gifts from God requires stewardship of those gifts. One important reason for the variety of gifting is to make the body of Christ whole, a mature and mutually-dependent presence in the world. Also, the variety of gifting channels our work into every area of culture. To what degree should we focus on our gifting and allow others who are differently gifted to focus on those areas? We might say, “I’m a doer, not a talker,” or “I’m a plumber not a preacher.” While that assessment may accurately reflect our gifting, does gifting free us from the responsibility of working outside our area of primary gifting? When does redemptive urgency override creational necessity? For instance, as Dorothy Sayers suggests in “Why Work?”, should the Acts 7 workers at table ever be compelled to lay aside the work at tables for which they have been gifted because the preaching of the Word is more urgently needed?

## Desire vs. Duty

We usually aspire to work in areas that we find fulfilling and that we regard as meaningful. We often look to desire as a significant guide in choosing our work. We look for work that hits the “sweet spot” of desire and opportunity. But, thinking of work in terms of desire (or “passion”) is often a privilege, perhaps even a luxury. Much of work is often forced upon us by necessity (“I just have to pay the bills”) or is reduced to what is available in a given circumstance (“It’s the only job I could find”). When do I hold out for work that hits the “sweet spot,” and when do I decide to be contented with the work that is available?

## Success vs. Futility

We want our work to be productive. We want to reach our goals and make a difference. Plus, we want God's blessing on every area of our lives. Does success equal God's blessing? How often does work done for God's glory produce redemptive results? How regularly should we expect the work of disciple-making to result in the making of disciples? How do we regard the creational and redemptive significance of our work when we fail or fall short of our goals? To what degree is success or failure a reliable indicator of God's use of our work? If success is not a reliable measure that we are working well or that God is blessing our work, to what degree should we strive for success or be indifferent to failure? How important is it that we see how God uses our work to make disciples or to produce human flourishing?

## Local vs. Global

Thanks to the media, the needs of the world relentlessly come crashing into our lives. The mission of God is certainly global, and technology and transportation make participating in global concerns a possibility. Is going better than staying? Does going represent a higher commitment to the mission of God? Is it selfishly indifferent to the enormous needs of the world to focus on our local work? Is it naïve to value global work over local work? How does God's promise to bless all the nations of the world and to bless the whole earth through his people inform how I approach my local work?

## Urgency vs. Rest

We engage in work out of desire and necessity. We work because we want to and because we need to. But, desire becomes idolatry and necessity becomes the tyranny of the urgent. Then, work demands that are pressed upon us too easily become dehumanizing tyranny. The baby is screaming and something has to be done. But of course the baby would start screaming just as the casserole is supposed to come out of the oven. So, do I run to care for baby, or do I save dinner? My employer or supervisor expects non-stop work until the project is completed, with no thought given to how this demand impacts my life and health. The 6 and 1 rhythm of creational work and rest means that most of life is occupied by work. But does work crowd out rest? Or, does rest become an excuse for indifference and indolence? How does the rest of new life in Christ inform our response to the idolatry and tyranny that often accompany work?

## Survey Results

The FWF exit survey provided some assessment responses that I plan to discuss in the closing chapter. Overall, the two survey groups provided some useful data portions of which I will review. The overwhelming majority of both groups affirmed a desire to better understand work, vocation, calling, and mission, as well as to have greater confidence that their work was the outworking of God's calling. A solid majority of both groups expressed a desire to better understanding the relationship of the kingdom of God and the mission of God to work, vocation, and calling. Both groups are highly churchied – an average of 87% attend worship services once or more each week.

However, some interesting differences emerged. 66% of the general survey group is over 50 (that figure increases to 87% by including everyone over 40). The FWF group is nearly evenly divided: 47% is under 40 and 53% is over 50. The general survey group is 62% male and 38% female, whereas the FWF group is almost evenly divided between males and females. In the area of spiritual disciplines, 63% of the general survey group engages in weekly reading for spiritual growth, but only 41% of the FWF group do so. While only 2% of the general survey group fasts at least once monthly, 24% of the FWF group do so. 19% of the general survey group celebrates the Eucharist weekly, compared to 75% of the FWF group. My sense is that these differences are both generational and reflective of changes within the rhythms of local Christian communities, which in themselves do not suggest formative differences in the practice of faithful presence.

The surveys reveal that both groups recognize a disparity between belief and practice when it comes to the relationship of faith and work. In similar proportions, both groups expressed nearly unanimous belief that work *should be* directly connected to faith, but both groups agree that their current practice falls short of the ideal. This admission corresponds to the opinion of 56% of the general survey group that local churches do not give adequate attention to the relationship of faith and work (the FWF group was not asked this question).

Questions that explored various aspects of the relationship of faith and work reveal several interesting contrasts. Consider the following data:

GENERAL (4-5) 86%	To what degree do you believe your work is CURRENTLY connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 53% Intake 75% Exit
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It is especially encouraging to note the movement among the FWF respondents between the intake and exit results. This change suggests a formative impact of the FWF on their thinking. This pattern holds true throughout the survey results.

When the FWF exit responses approximate those of the general survey group, I wonder what accounts for the similarity. Several possibilities come to mind, although the data point to no clear correlation. One, the general group is older and more predominately male and married. Another is regional influence: slightly over 50% of the general respondents reside in the Southern triangle formed by VA, FL, and TX. By contrast, all of the FWF respondents live and work in Ithaca, NY.

However, the data suggests that the general survey group tends to locate the intersection of faith and work in their life experience differently than the FWF group. 68% of the general group never or rarely experiences faith/work conflict. That figure jumps to 89% with the

GENERAL (1-2) 68%	How frequently do you experience a sense of conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ? (1 - never; 5 - constantly)	FWF (4-5) 34%
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inclusion of those who experience conflict occasionally. However, 34% of the FWF group experiences conflict constantly and regularly. That figure increases to 59% with the inclusion of those who experience conflict occasionally. The data indicate that the FWF group experiences a significantly higher frequency of faith/work conflict.

GENERAL (1-2) 61%	When you experience conflict between work and faith, how difficult is it to find resolution? (1 - easy; 5 - impossible)	FWF NA
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One explanation for that differential in the experience of conflict may be how the two groups regard the nature of the conflict. 61% of the general group regards resolution to the conflicts as easily manageable (primarily through conversation with other Christians or through self-reflection). The data suggests that the general group does not regard their experience of faith/work conflict as a serious or threatening problem. The data does not suggest whether the belief that faith/work conflict is non-threatening is due to lack of awareness, lack of actual conflict, or some other factor. Since the FWF itself was designed to



address the resolution of faith/work conflict, the question of conflict resolution was not included in the FWF group surveys.

GENERAL	How many other Christians do you know in your local community who are engaged in work similar to yours?	FWF
0-1 15%		0-1 41%
10+ 49%		10+ 24%

Perhaps another factor that impacts the awareness, experience, and resolution of faith/work conflict is the recognition of the presence of fellow Christians in the same geographic and vocational vicinity. A rather dramatic disparity between the two groups emerges on this question. 41% of the FWF group know of only 0-1 fellow Christians in their field and in their community. By contrast 49% of the general group knows of 10 or more fellow Christians in their field and in their community. The data hints that the vocational camaraderie assessable to the general group could positively influence their awareness, experience, and resolution of faith/work conflict. Conversely, the lack of vocational camaraderie accessible to the FWF group could adversely impact their awareness and experience of faith/work conflict as well as what resources they recognize and tap for help in resolving that conflict.

The following cluster of questions explores the respondents' understanding of the impact of the practice of faithful presence on their current work.

GENERAL (4-5) 79%	To what degree do you believe your work presently participates in God's ongoing sustaining of Creation? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 55% Intake 92% Exit
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GENERAL (4-5) 74%	To what degree do you believe your work presently participates in God's work of restraining evil and corruption in the world? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 59% Intake 75% Exit
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GENERAL (4-5) 88%	To what degree do you believe your work presently participates in the Kingdom of God and/or mission of God? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 59% Intake 85% Exit
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GENERAL (4-5) 80%	To what degree do you believe your work presently participates in God's work to renew and redeem all things? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 47% Intake 75% Exit
GENERAL (4-5) 51%	To what degree do you believe your work brings hope or a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth promised by Christ? (1 - not at all; 5 - in every way)	FWF (4-5) 41% Intake 58% Exit

While I find the overall responses to be generally encouraging, I note with interest the difference in the response to the fifth question regarding hope. The data suggests that while the respondents in both groups are readily able to make the connection between their work and the *present* concerns of the kingdom of God, they are less able to make the connection with *future* realities of God's kingdom. I can only speculate about the reason for this lower level of expectation. Perhaps because the disparity between the way the world is currently and the expected reality of heaven is so great, the respondents are more inclined to believe that their attempts to anticipate heaven are inconsequential. Perhaps they are less able to make the connection because they lack a clear view of heaven and the world made new. However, the data suggests that one reason is not a negative view of creation – to the contrary, the data suggests that the respondents have a very strong positive view of engagement with and investment in creation. But perhaps another underlying reason is a general weariness that makes hope difficult and a discouragement that makes it hard to hope. To the extent that hope informs our understanding of change, renewal, and transformation, a deficient hope makes for an incomplete practice of faithful presence.

### General Observations

The experience of leading the FWF and engaging in conversations with the participants in the Faith and Work seminars as well as interacting with the survey data have provoked

several insights that are helping me refine my understanding of how to present faithful presence in light of a better understanding of the Christians who will be served by these ideas and recommendations.

### Kingdom of God

Among those currently in conversation about the relationship of the church and culture, the debate between the “Two Kingdoms” model and the transformationist model figures prominently. Where is the locus of the life of the church? Where should Christians expect to see change? Answers to these more broadly historical questions all shape a view of faith and work. But, the current controversy in popular Evangelicalism over views of the kingdom of God dates back to the early twentieth century with the emergence of Dispensationalism and Pentecostalism. Dispensationalism presents an oddly bifurcated view of the kingdom with its truncated Israel/church distinction, and it promotes an arguably Gnostic view of creation by locating the kingdom of God in an other-world yet to come (a world that is decidedly not this world). Pentecostalism has tended to locate the kingdom of God in its revelation of the Spirit’s presence, a personalized and experiential view of the kingdom. Any biblical view of faith and work must wrestle to define and locate the kingdom of God as it articulates a clear understanding of the relationship of the church and culture and of work and the world.

### Eschatology

Work inescapably looks to the future and what work accomplishes. Human significance is deeply rooted in accomplishment even as hope is oriented toward what will become

present when the future arrives. No less is Christian theology. It has been said that, except for a brief thirty-year window of time, God's people have always lived waiting for Christ to come. Our faces have always been toward the future. But eschatology ultimately is not about only last things. Rather it is about how we are to live today with a sure knowledge of last things. Eschatology informs how our present lives are part of that trajectory of human history and divine purpose that culminates in the fulfillment of all that God has promised to his people and to the world. Work figures significantly into the ongoing mission of creation and redemption. Therefore, eschatology informs how work contributes to the consummation.

## Creation

Even when we offer work as worship, we work in the world. That is, in the stuff of the material world. I have already noted the spiritual/material tension that exists in the way Christians think about the relationship of faith and work. But any understanding of faith and work as well as the practice of faithful presence must begin with the affirmation that creation is good. Even though sin encumbers creation in every way, God made it and declared it good. So it remains. Stewardship and creativity become essential dimensions of work that affirm that goodness. Yet a holistic view of work informed by mission engages with the creation as both good and broken. Handling the stuff of creation as well as the brokenness of peoples' lives presses us always to keep in view the glory of what things are right now as well as the promise that God will make all things new in Christ — all creation will be completed because of the resurrection. Consequently, faithful presence is the practice of

simultaneous celebration and sorrow. Work that worships both gives thanks for the gift of creation and bears God's grace that heals the wounds of the world.

### The Church

The culture at large struggles for coherence with the loss of community. So, too, does the church. Individualism and autonomy pull us away from membership and corporate commitment. As a result local congregations suffer from a lack of catholic identity and unified community. To the extent that work depends on a shared mission that unites workers in a coherent vision, the church must provide that community. Church leadership needs to recapture a sense of belonging to a larger body as well as a sense of place in which to carry out the overarching mission of the church. But at a deeper level, the church needs to be a place of the Spirit in which gifts of grace are given to members for their work and by which change is possible. The Spirit gives skill, courage, love, and wisdom to understand the Word of God (the mission of God) and to embrace the work to which the church needs to give herself. The means of grace, therefore, are critical in making the connection between the role of the Spirit in and among us and the mission of God to which the Spirit unites us in Christ. Work can be a faithful presence only if it is marked by the presence of God's Spirit in the community of the church.

### Instrumentality and Integrality

Work is action, and action implies progress, movement, a destination, or an outcome. In the culture at large, then, work is the means by which people distinguish themselves, by

which they accomplish things and thereby achieve dignity and value. But work in the kingdom of God and work that expresses faithful presence, demands more than productivity. The value of work in God's economy is not determined by what it produces, by either the quality or quantity of its outcome. Work for us as Christians is not reduced to being merely a means to an end whether that be the salvation of the lost or the provision of daily bread. Our perception of the degree to which work accomplishes something remains just that, a perception. Because the Spirit is at work in our work, there is always more going on that we are able to discern. Therefore, any instrumental value that we discern in our work, while true enough, is a reduction of what is really being accomplished and must not be the measure of what make the work worth doing. Work is integral. That is, its function is to serve as much as it is to accomplish. Therefore, the practice of faithful presence affirms both the instrumental as well as the integral value of work. Furthermore, our understanding of the means God employs to accomplish his purpose (instrumentality) must include all the elements of creation. Whether it be Balaam's ass, Cyrus, Joseph sold into slavery, or Mary the handmaid of the Lord; whether it be the tides of the economy, health, or weather, all the elements of creation serve him to further and accomplish his purpose. Work that is an expression of love affirms that the work is worth doing for its own sake. If it is only a means of barter to elicit something we want, it cannot be love. Learning to practice faithful presence means disconnecting work from the materialistic model that holds it hostage in much of our public culture. Faithful presence requires patience for God to accomplish his purposes in his time, and faith to trust that his timing is good and his means are wise and effective.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*One never can see, or not till long afterward, why anyone was selected for any job,  
and when one does, it is usually some reason that leaves no room for vanity.*  
Ransom<sup>1</sup>

The exploration of faithful presence takes this study into an examination of the cultural loss of community; the biblical understanding of calling, mission, and community; and the local congregation's role in encouraging and equipping men and women to practice faithful presence. This dissertation considers primarily that body of literature which explores the intersection of a) church and calling as distinct expressions of Christian belief and practice with b) culture and community as general sociological and anthropological phenomena.

### THE CULTURAL LOSS OF COMMUNITY

The experience and value of community has been a diminishing presence in American culture since the earliest days of the Republic.<sup>2</sup> The decline of community and the rise of individualism have been documented by Alexis de Tocqueville, the French social historian, drawn to the newly-minted but not-entirely united United States to discover what distinguished the sudden success of the American revolution and political experiment from

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Scribners, 1944), 22.

<sup>2</sup> See the review of *Bowling Alone* in which Robert Putnam argues that community has not been in a state of *constant* decline throughout American history. He would prefer to say that it has been in *regular* but *episodic* decline, yet has been so for the last third of the twentieth century with no sign of reversal thus far in the twenty-first century.

the comparative failure of the French revolution. *Democracy in America* is his monumental four-volume social critique of the new nation's identity, growth, and future (published in two parts in 1835 and in 1840). Nearly two hundred years later, Tocqueville's insights remain remarkably (and disturbingly) prophetic. Tocqueville's analysis is so profound that it is hard to imagine any study of modern American social formation that does not begin with his work and thought. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn says in the introduction to the Arlington House edition of *Democracy in America* that Tocqueville captures a conflicted vision of what he observed in the rapidly evolving American society. On the one hand he marveled at common citizens being empowered with explosive creative and political energy. Yet, on the other hand, "his feeling for the shape of things to come was *une sorte de terreur religieuse*,"<sup>3</sup> a sort of religious terror. Forces had been unleashed that may eventually undermine the very public good on display for all the world to see.

A helpful synthesis and summary of Tocqueville's writings, including *Democracy in America*, is *The Tocqueville Reader* edited by Oliver Kunz and Alan S. Kahan. They do an excellent job of surfacing and clarifying the major threads in the corpus of Tocqueville's writing while at the same time preserving the nuance and flavor of Tocqueville's style and personality.

However, perhaps the most significant contemporary engagement with Tocqueville's critique is found in *Habits of the Heart*, edited principally by Robert Bellah. *Habits of the Heart* is subtitled: *Individualism and Commitment in American Public Life*. Bellah and company conducted a sociological study to trace forward Tocqueville's observations and intuitions about individualism and community. Bellah writes that Tocqueville "helped to give currency to a new word." Individualism.

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<sup>3</sup> Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, forward to *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, n.d.), xviii.



Individualism is more moderate and orderly than egoism, but in the end its results are much the same [quoting Tocqueville]: “Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself. . . . They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands.” . . . Such people come to “forget their ancestors,” . . . their descendants, as well as isolating themselves from their contemporaries. “Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.”<sup>4</sup>

Connecting Tocqueville’s critique with the world as we know it, Bellah says that

the most distinctive part of twentieth-century American society is the division of life into a number of separate functional sectors: home and workplace, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public and private. . . . Particularly powerful in molding our contemporary sense of things has been the division between the various “tracks” to achievement laid out in schools, corporation, government, and the professions, on the one hand, and the balancing life-sectors of home, personal ties, and “leisure” on the other.<sup>5</sup>

Lost is the sense of common calling expressed in the Labor Day collect in the Book of Common Prayer: “So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for the self alone, but for the common good.”<sup>6</sup> Bellah observes that common calling has been replaced with the individual quest for self-fulfillment as expressed in the Army recruiting slogan, “Be all that you can be,” and in colloquial aspirations to “go find yourself” or “go make something of yourself.

But individualism results not only in fragmentation, but also displacement. “The self has become ever more detached from the social and cultural contexts that embody the traditions” that have shaped and defined us.<sup>7</sup> A loss of cultural memory accompanies the loss of tradition. Particularly germane to this dissertation is Bellah’s observation that “the

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<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Bellah, *The Habits of the Heart*, 43. Lesslie Newbigin agrees in describing the impact of the industrialized division of labor and the “removal of work from the home to the factory.” Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 29-30).

<sup>6</sup> Bellah, *The Habits of the Heart*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Bellah, *The Habits of the Heart*, 55.

self-reliant American is required not only to leave home but to 'leave church' as well."<sup>8</sup> All this is the flowering of the forces of individualism as chronicled by Tocqueville. Now, in the paradigm of American social culture, "the individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest."<sup>9</sup>

Furthering the evaluation of modern social fragmentation – the pay-off of individualism and the loss of community – Robert Putnam has penned *Bowling Alone* (2000) and a sequel, *Better Together* (2003), which looks hopefully toward (as the sub-title states) *Restoring the American Community*. Putnam examines in great detail multiple components of the social fabric as he evaluates what he calls the decline of "social capital," a "conceptual cousin" of community.<sup>10</sup> He statistically analyzes public connections in political, civic, and religious life; as well as in the workplace, in social settings, and in philanthropic ventures. He documents the ebb and flow of social capital. "Social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations." An abundance of good people is not enough on its own to generate social capital, the economic currency of community. "A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital."<sup>11</sup> Virtue needs a coherent social cultural web for community to flourish.

The data reveals that "without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the [twentieth] century."<sup>12</sup> Putnam concludes we are starved for social capital because we as a society are less embedded in

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<sup>8</sup> Bellah, *The Habits of the Heart*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Bellah, *The Habits of the Heart*, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 27.

community life. He identifies four factors which are contributing to the decline in civic engagement and social capital:

First, pressures of time and money, including the special pressures on two-career families....

Second, suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl....

Third, the effect of electronic entertainment – above all, television – in privatizing our leisure time....

Fourth and most important, generational change – the slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren.<sup>13</sup>

As Putnam looks toward the rebuilding of social capital and the recovering of community, he values the role of churches and the faith community. “Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America....It is hard to see how we could redress the erosion of the last several decades without a major religious contribution.”<sup>14</sup>

“Americans today feel vaguely and uncomfortably disconnected,”<sup>15</sup> observes Putnam, and while we are not bridging our lives into large communities, we are drifting with varying degrees of commitment into the associations which Tocqueville witnessed, small groups that in some cases become a substitute for family and neighborhood, where we hope to find security and intimacy.<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons Putnam resists the idea that community has been in constant decline is that he believes the networks, the social threads that support the generation of social capital, while eroded on the one hand are re-aligned on the other. Much community is presently to be found in small groups, at times deeply authentic and at other times shamelessly superficial.

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<sup>13</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 283.

<sup>14</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 66, 408-409.

<sup>15</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 402.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 151-152.

Robert Wuthnow echoes Putnam in describing the impact of individualism and the loss of community in the title of his book, *Loose Connections*. Tocqueville observed the movement toward smaller private societies defined by special interests, groups that adopted a commercial character in vying for influence and appeal. Tocqueville emphasizes the importance of being alert to this trend:

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. These are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types – religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.<sup>17</sup>

Modern social institutions have become “porous,” creating a fluidity that is incompatible with attachment.<sup>18</sup> Today, Wuthnow observes, “our lives are molded by social conditions that make looser connections seem more appropriate.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, “*community* itself has become an ambiguous term to many Americans.”<sup>20</sup> The loose connections which have replaced solid community, he believes, may now “be purely instrumental, thus failing to nurture the casual socializing that leads to deeper friendships”<sup>21</sup> thus reshaping the social context in which moral choices are made.<sup>22</sup> Career has come to define self.<sup>23</sup> In the absence of shared experience, communication, and common courtesy, trust is lost.<sup>24</sup> However, relevant to this dissertation, Wuthnow observes that “the most significant traditional” communities of social coherence “left in many urban communities are churches.” There is

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<sup>17</sup> de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.114-118.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 68.

<sup>21</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 207.

<sup>22</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 221.

<sup>23</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 179-202.

even the widely-held expectation that churches “take up the additional burden of combating the problems of urban decay.”<sup>25</sup>

“*Community* is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there.”<sup>26</sup> To be human is to desire both security and freedom (a simultaneous attachment and detachment), but we have discovered that “we cannot have both at the same time in quantities which we find fully satisfactory.”<sup>27</sup> In *Community*, Zygmunt Bauman approaches his description of modern cultural fragmentation, individualism run amuck, in more aesthetic terms, particularly as he critiques the contemporary ground upon which moral choices are made. In our present cultural setting,

identity seems to share its existential status with beauty: like beauty, it has no other foundation to rest on but widely shared agreement, explicit or tacit, expressed in a consensual approval of judgement or in uniform conduct. Just as beauty boils down to artistic experience, the community in question is brought forth and consumed in the “warm circle” of experience. Its “objectivity” is woven entirely from the friable threads of subjective judgments, though the fact that they are woven together colours those judgements with a veneer of objectivity.<sup>28</sup>

Decisions and moral choices, he argues, are now “aesthetically, rather than ethically” informed.<sup>29</sup> He explains:

One thing which the aesthetic community emphatically does not do is to weave between its adherents a web of ethical responsibilities, and so of long-term commitments. Whatever bonds are established in the explosively brief life of the aesthetic community, they do not truly bind: they are, literally, “bonds without consequences.” They tend to evaporate at the moment when human bonds truly matter – that is, at a time when they are needed to compensate for the individual’s lack of resourcefulness or impotence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wuthnow, *Loose Connections*, 124.

<sup>26</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Bauman, *Community*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Bauman, *Community*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> Bauman, *Community*, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Bauman, *Community*, 71.

As communities dissolve, there is a profound impact on how individual people understand who they are and why they matter. There are spiritual and ontological implications for the triumph of individualism. Reinhold Niebuhr in *Man's Nature and His Communities* laments the persistent human bent toward tribalism encouraged by the *expressive individualism* (Bellah's term)<sup>31</sup> of John Locke's "rational idealism"<sup>32</sup> that validated the Colonial quest for independence. Independence from England gradually but certainly became the justifying hallmark by which Americans sought independence from a whole host of traditions and community bonds. Niebuhr observes that even the common Christian faith shared by American blacks and whites (from the Civil War that would erupt not many years after Tocqueville's visit until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s) could not establish sufficient community (or, in Putnam's terms, would not have generated sufficient social capital from which to draw) with a common view of human identity and civility that would enable unity. In America, he warns, we face the "danger" of "becoming unduly dependent upon mild illusions about human nature and the political order. For these illusions obscure the refractory character of man's nature and particularly the stubborn force of his collective self-regard."<sup>33</sup>

Understanding the historical trajectory that has produced the modern triumph of individualism and the erosion of community is a necessary diagnostic step if we are to move toward the recovery of community. It is essential that we grasp the complex ways that our lives have been re-ordered by the near deification of the self and the neglect of the roots of a shared life.

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<sup>31</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 60.

<sup>33</sup> Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 63.

This re-ordering has created a shift in the kinds of questions we ask about our place and purpose in the world. Less frequently do we hear, “Is it good?” More frequently do we hear, “Will it make me happy?” David Brooks observes “the litany of expressive individualism which is...the dominant note in American culture....Follow *your* passion, chart *your* own course, march to the beat of *your* own drummer, follow *your* dreams and find *yourself*.”<sup>34</sup> Brooks retorts in the title of his essay: “It’s Not About You.” The world of possibilities stretching out before the current generation has a glow of freedom illuminating a path all the way to the horizon of promised fulfillment. But in that light of self-fulfilling passion, Brooks suggests, we start living life backward. “Most people [today] don’t form a self and then lead a life. [Instead] they are called by a problem, and the self is constructed gradually by their calling.”<sup>35</sup> Echoing Jesus’ call to discipleship, Brooks calls us back to community, “The purpose in life is not to find yourself. It’s to lose yourself.”<sup>36</sup>

Pursing happiness and self-fulfillment actually create pathways to social self-destruction. Telling someone to follow his or her dreams certainly sounds positive and life-affirming. Two roads have indeed diverged in the wood of this world, but the road of happiness does not lead to meaning. It often leads only to the discovery that “there is more to life than happiness.” So says Emily Esfahani Smith in *The Atlantic*. She quotes Kathleen Vohs: “Happy people get a lot of joy from receiving benefits from others, while people leading meaningful lives get a lot of joy from giving to others.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> David Brooks, “It’s Not About All You,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2011, A23.

<sup>35</sup> Brooks, “It’s Not All About You.”

<sup>36</sup> Brooks, “It’s Not All About You.”

<sup>37</sup> Emily Esfahani Smith, “There’s More to Life Than Being Happy,” *The Atlantic*, January 09, 2013, <http://m.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/01/theres-more-to-life-than-being-happy/266805> (accessed November 01, 2013).

Miya Toumitsu picks up the same thread in *Jacobin*: “‘Do what you love’ is the mantra for today’s worker”<sup>38</sup> peddled by the likes of Oprah Winfrey and Steve Jobs. “Superficially, DWYL is an uplifting piece of advice, urging us to ponder what it is we most enjoy doing and then turn that activity into a wage-generating enterprise....[But] by keeping us focused on ourselves and our individual happiness, DWYL distracts us from...others....It is the secret handshake of the privileged and a worldview that disguises its elitism as noble self-betterment.”<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, if we are to recover community, we have to recapture a working knowledge of its now too-unfamiliar dynamics. Here, the work of Peter Block in *Community* becomes illuminating and useful. He writes:

Community...is about the experience of belonging....First and foremost, to belong is to be related to and a part of something. It is membership, the experience of being at home....It is the opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else....

The second meaning of the word *belong* has to do with being an owner: Something belongs to me....

Belonging can also be thought of as a longing to be. Being is our capacity to find our deeper purpose in all that we do.<sup>40</sup>

Block discusses a wide range of component tools of community and community formation, and he offers a careful yet non-prescriptive explanation of how these tools can be employed: the importance of small groups, the significance of asking questions, the role and style of leadership. My own summary of his ideas looks like this:

Love	creates	Accountability
Bridges	create	Connectivity
Power	creates	Opportunity
Belonging	creates	Identity
Conversation	creates	Transformation

<sup>38</sup> Miya Tokumitsu, “In the Name of Love,” *Jacobin*, January 2014, <http://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love> (accessed January 23, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Tokumitsu, “In the Name of Love.”

<sup>40</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), xii.



These are essential components to communities and the process of community formation that he encourages against the backdrop of his assessment of the modern situation.

We are living in an age of isolation....Ironically, we talk today of how small our world has become, with the shrinking effect of globalization, instant sharing of information, quick technology, workplaces that operate around the globe. Yet these do not necessarily create a sense of belonging. They provide connection, diverse information, an infinite range of opinion. But all this does not create the connection from which we can become grounded and experience the sense of safety that arises from a place where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically a member.<sup>41</sup>

## THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CALLING, MISSION, AND COMMUNITY

The loss of community in the culture at large opens a tremendous door of opportunity for us as Christians to live in a community that is in communion with God and one another, bearing his image with hope and dignity, and experiencing the first fruits of our life together in the *shalom* of God's kingdom. Reshaping our lives as this new community of grace and redemption requires us to consider what is the relationship of the church to culture and creation, what does it mean for the church to be a community, what is the mission of the church, and how do Christians interpret the mission of the church in the context of personal calling. One primary premise for this dissertation is that local congregations must recapture the practice of community if they are to serve the common good and if they are effectively to encourage and equip Christians to embody a robust understanding and practice of calling.

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<sup>41</sup> Block, *Community*, 1-2.

## The Church in Culture

For the second half of the twentieth century, the conversation about the church's relationship to culture<sup>42</sup> was dominated by H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*.<sup>43</sup> D.A. Carson asserts that "it is hard to overstate the influence" of Niebuhr's contribution to this area of thought.<sup>44</sup> The biblical commands central to the identity of the church – to love, to obey, to serve, to worship – must all be enacted in place and time. The church, quite obviously, co-inhabits place and time with the non-church. How the church conceives of the relationship between not only the non-believing and fallen parts of creation, but also the whole of creation, informs and is informed by its mission and identity.

The typologies of this relationship identified by Niebuhr offer an explanation of how the church historically has defined this relationship. Those five typologies are:

Christ *against* Culture  
Christ *of* Culture  
Christ *over* Culture  
Christ *in paradox with* Culture  
Christ *transforming* Culture

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<sup>42</sup> Ken Myers defined culture as "what human beings make of creation, in both senses" [of the word *make*] in Albert Louis Zambone, "But What Do You Think, Ken Myers?" *regeneration quarterly* 6, no. 3 (2000). This is the best working definition of culture I know. However, the ideas of Clifford Geertz have dominated the modern discussion of culture. Geertz argues for a semiotic view of culture. "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (p. 5). Thus, culture is "a highly transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973).

<sup>43</sup> This conversation was going on only among those who were *aware* of culture. David Foster Wallace, in the commencement address he delivered to the 2005 graduates of Kenyon College, illustrated the pervasive lack of cultural awareness with this story: "There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, 'Morning boys, how's the water?'... One of [the young fish] looks over at the other and goes, 'What the hell is water?'" David Foster Wallace, "On Life and Work," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122178211966454607.html> (accessed October 11, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 29.

John Stackhouse in *Making the Best of It* offers a helpful defense of Niebuhr's analysis. He begins by reminding us of the difference between typology and taxonomy (Niebuhr's categories being the former). "A typology is a pure intellectual construct, a setting out of the logical possibilities of a situation....A taxonomy is a classification of things as they actually are, in all their specificity."<sup>45</sup> This means that Niebuhr has not intended to suggest that these are five exhaustive possibilities (although it would be difficult to add meaningful alternatives to the list), but they are descriptive arrangements of how the church has behaved in history in relationship to culture. Admittedly, in spite of his intention to generalize, Niebuhr tips his hand and hints at his preference for the transformational model.

These typologies work together to describe an organic and dynamic relationship that the church has with culture. While one expression may be more prominent at one place and time, multiple expressions could be in play in any number of complex social scenarios.

Stackhouse quotes John Howard Yoder to explain:

Some elements of culture the church categorically rejects (pornography, tyranny, cultic idolatry). Other dimensions of culture it accepts within clear limits (economic production, commerce, the graphic arts, paying taxes for peacetime civil government). To still other dimensions of culture Christian faith gives a new motivation and coherence (agriculture, family life, literacy, conflict resolution, empowerment). Still others it strips of their claim to possess autonomous truth and value, and uses them as vehicles of communication (philosophy, language, Old Testament ritual, music). Still other forms of culture are *created* by the Christian churches (hospitals, service of the poor, generalized education, egalitarianism, abolitionism, feminism).<sup>46</sup>

D.A. Carson, in *Christ and Culture Revisited*, affirms that wrestling with this multi-faceted relationship which Niebuhr has illuminated for us remains vital for a mature faith and a healthy church. The incarnation and resurrection of Christ both press us to deal with the real, corporeal connection Christ has with creation. Those who are resurrected with Christ

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<sup>45</sup> John Stackhouse, *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 32.

<sup>46</sup> Stackhouse, *Making the Best of It*, 34.

will share this creation connection with Christ in perpetuity. Furthermore, the advent of Christ is a deeper and more permanent establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth, a kingdom no less material and historical than the temporary kingdom of Old Testament Israel. These core biblical realities require us to admit that Christ along with his people and his mission are forever united to culture, the world, the creation.<sup>47</sup> With every new generation, the church, particularly local congregations, faces the challenge of working out that relationship in its specific time and place in a way that is faithful to the triune God. This is the heart of community that is Christian – community that is defined first by its relationship to Christ and its dependence upon the work of Christ, and community that is purposeful and responsible in relating to every aspect of culture.

Rodney Clapp, in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*, writes: “Faith is cultural and timely, not acultural and atemporal. It is important for the church in each time and place to embody and communicate the life of Christ exactly where it is. Christianity is not about compartmentalization or withdrawal: it is radically and relentlessly life-encompassing.”<sup>48</sup> He continues, quoting theologian Joseph Kotva: the “issue is not whether to participate” in other cultures, “but how and when” to participate.<sup>49</sup>

Clapp reminds us, too, that the church’s cultural presence, is not only responsive to the culture, but it is also missional and sacred. Here he quotes Karl Barth who insists that

there is “no secular space” abandoned and totally apart from God in “the world reconciled by God in Jesus Christ.” But that is not because one or another secular sphere has somewhere independently tapped into truth. There is finally no absolutely secular sphere precisely because the world has been reconciled by God in Christ. Because the world has been reconciled through Christ, no part of it is outside God’s caring presence.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 52-58.

<sup>48</sup> Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 188.

<sup>49</sup> Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 155.

<sup>50</sup> Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 154-145.

So, he concludes that the “strengthening distinctive Christian community is at once one of the most essential and the most formidable challenges the church faces in our world.”<sup>51</sup>

## The Church and Creation

Closely related to our understanding of the church’s relationship to culture is the church’s relationship to creation – culture being what one does with and how one regards the world, and creation being the thing itself.

In *Earthen Vessels*, Matthew Anderson asks the question, “Why do our bodies matter to our faith?” His answer is a thoughtful reflection on the many dimensions of living an embodied faith. Quoting Oliver O’Donovan, Anderson affirms that the most direct and personal connection we have with the creation is our bodies in which we experience the redemption of God in Christ: “the Spirit forms and brings to expression the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality.”<sup>52</sup> Because redemption is at work within creation itself (and that includes our bodies), Christians must carefully distinguish in our relationship to creation the difference between *being* and *doing*, between what creation *is* and our culture-making *use* of creation. Again, Anderson quotes O’Donovan:

What marks this culture out most importantly is not anything that it does, but what it thinks. It is not “technological” because its instruments of making are extraordinarily sophisticated (though that is evidently the case), *but because it thinks of everything it does as a form of instrumental making*. Politics...is talked of as “making a better world”; love is “building a successful relationship.” There is no place for simply *doing*.<sup>53</sup>

The shift from *doing* to *being* and *thinking* is the realignment of our worldview. It’s a change in how we view the world, the creation – what it is, why it’s here, where it’s going,

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<sup>51</sup> Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 193.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 29.

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Earthen Vessels*, 26.

and our part in it all as humans and Christians. Albert Wolters in *Creation Regained* says simply that a worldview is “the comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.”<sup>54</sup> Wolters outlines the four epochal stages of that framework: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. Theology 101 is to affirm that God alone is the creator and redeemer of the world, and that he will finish what he began. We humans live between the Fall and Consummation, and since Christ, between our Redeemer’s resurrection and his return. That is, we live with the ground of redemption made sure so that we are free to live with faith, hope, and love. But Wolters emphasizes that our worldview is not only about what God has done, is doing, and will do, but also about our place as his image bearers in his work. The charge given to God’s image bearers to complete his creation (a mandate that has not been lifted by the Fall) is of “foundational importance for the whole scriptural history of revelation.”<sup>55</sup> Wolters rhapsodizes:

If we see that human history and the unfolding of culture and society are integral to creation and its development, that they are not outside God’s plans for the cosmos, despite the sinful aberrations, but rather were built in from the beginning, were part of the blueprint that we never understood before, then we will be much more open to the positive possibilities for service to God in such areas as politics and the film arts, computer technology and business administration, developmental economics and skydiving.<sup>56</sup>

The church as the community of grace lives in the world, working to complete God’s creation and waiting for God’s redemption to be completed in us and in the creation we inhabit.

Thus, Basil of Caesarea prayed in 375, “Oh, God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom Thou gavest the earth in

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<sup>54</sup> Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 2.

<sup>55</sup> Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 38.

common with us.”<sup>57</sup> Craig Bartholomew, in *Where Mortals Dwell*, affirming Basil’s prayer, offers us a “Christian view of place” (his sub-title). Bartholomew surveys the importance of the dirt under our feet on the Christian journey. We were made from the dirt in a world declared to be “good.” God’s covenant to redeem a great people to himself includes the promise of land, a place to call home, a physical answer to the alienation in which all people have been born since expulsion from Eden. The exilic life of God’s people both before and after Christ requires us to trust God’s promise to bring us to our true home, which turns out to be better than a small piece of real estate on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The whole creation will be redeemed and made forever fit as the dwelling place of God with his people. Much like Naaman took soil from Israel to have beneath his knees when he prayed in Syria, we are to live with dirt beneath our feet – real dirt, not just metaphorical dirt.

For the community of God’s people to embody a mature theology of place, Bartholomew points us to at least three concepts that inform the church’s relationship to creation. First, “any theology of place worth its salt must be *christocentric*. As Newbigin asserts, Christ is the clue to all that is....However, precisely because such a theology is christocentric, it will be *trinitarian*.”<sup>58</sup> The person and work of Christ, of course, centers on the incarnation and resurrection of our Saviour. He is the brother of his people forever; he is forever joined to the dirt of creation and therefore the promise that he will be with us, never to forsake us, describes the ground upon which we stand, or sleep, or work, or play today.

Second, a theology of place affirms the nature/culture dichotomy. Nature is fallen, and sin pollutes every part of creation. But, even sin cannot rob the world of its creational goodness. Therefore, we must not be naïve about the challenge nature in its fallenness poses

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<sup>57</sup> Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 18.

<sup>58</sup> Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 243.

to the formation of culture. In nature we see and experience alienation from God, the corruption that is in the world by sin<sup>59</sup> and the homelessness of all that has yet to be reconciled to God. But neither must we pit nature and culture against one another as adversaries. Nature will be redeemed through the agency of gospel-empowered culture, agents of redemptive grace, the means of grace and the stewardship of gifts distributed by God's Spirit. Therefore, a "biblical view of creation resists a nature-culture dichotomy that privileges wilderness over placemaking. Cultural development, including placemaking, is normative and fundamentally good,"<sup>60</sup> and therefore redemptive. N.T. Wright states it colorfully:

Take away the goodness of creation, and you have a judgment in which the world is thrown away as garbage, leaving us sitting on a disembodied cloud playing disembodied harps. Take away judgment, and you have this world rumbling forward with no hope. Put creation and judgment together, and you get new heavens and new earth, created not *ex nihilo*, but *ex vetere*, not out of nothing, but out of the old one, the existing one.<sup>61</sup>

Third, Bartholomew insists that "few things would help the church in its engagement with culture as much as the recovery of a rich theology and practice of the Eucharist."<sup>62</sup> What could impact the way the Christian community understands and values its life in the world more than the regular celebration that declares, "This is the body and blood of Christ." Christ is present, here, in this place. Redemption and resurrection are presently at work in us and through us, the hope of consummation.

Creation and culture are also God's agent of common grace, his ordinary and extravagant goodness poured out upon the whole of creation. Christians, members of the church, are in this regard no different from anyone else. All creatures, even every element of

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<sup>59</sup> 2 Pet 1:4.

<sup>60</sup> Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 245.

<sup>61</sup> Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 246.

<sup>62</sup> Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 246.



creation itself, are beneficiaries of God's grace through his creation. Consequently, a biblical and theologically informed view of how the church relates to creation includes a call to humility, a call to receive of God's goodness. Richard Mouw, in *He Shines in All That's Fair*, drawing upon a 1924 synodical declaration by the Christian Reformed Church, affirms that

there is a kind of non-salvific attitude of divine favor toward all human beings, manifested in three ways: (1) the bestowal of natural gifts, such as rain and sunshine, upon creatures in general, (2) the restraining of sin in human affairs, so that the unredeemed do not produce all of the evil that their depraved natures might otherwise bring about, and (3) the ability of unbelievers to perform acts of civic good.<sup>63</sup>

Common grace affirms that God is at work through and for the good of all things. But Mouw muses, "A critical question to ask...is whether salvific categories are adequate to cover all God's dispositions toward human beings, both redeemed and unredeemed. More specifically, is the ultimate destiny of human beings the only thing that God thinks about in assessing what we think, feel, and do?"<sup>64</sup> Mouw then answers his own questions: "I am convinced that God's delight in [Creation and the artifacts of culture] does not come because they bring the elect to glory and the non-elect to eternal separation from the divine presence. I think God enjoys these things for their *own* sakes."<sup>65</sup>

Our belief in common grace is a celebration in the wideness of God's mercy and the inexhaustible resources at God's disposal to accomplish all his purpose in creation and redemption. On this theme, Mouw quotes Herman Bavinck who waxes eloquent:

The "state of glory" will be rich and glorious beyond all description. We expect a new heaven, a new earth, a new humanity, a renewed universe, a constantly progressing and undisturbed unfoldment. Creation and fall, Adam and Christ, nature and grace, faith and unbelief, election and reprobation – all together and each in its own way – are so many factors, acting not only subsequently to but also in coordination with one another, collaborating with a view to that exalted state of glory. Indeed, even the universe as it is now exists together with its history,

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 9.

<sup>64</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 36.

constitutes a continuous revelation of God's virtues. It is not only a means toward a higher and richer revelation that is still future, but it has value in itself. It will continue to exert its influence also in the coming dispensation, and it will continue to furnish material for the exaltation and glorification of God by a redeemed humanity.<sup>66</sup>

How then does this theology of common grace shape the relationship of the church to creation? Mouw concludes: "One of the significant cultural tasks that the Christian community must perform in the world is simply to be a community – a fellowship of people who, in the patterns of their life together, serve as a sign of faithfulness in the larger world."<sup>67</sup>

### The Church as Community

How then does the church inhabit culture as a distinctly Christian community? If the church, like the larger culture, is suffering from eroded and weakened community, what features of our shared life need to be changed and cultivated?

Community, by definition, has boundaries – lines that distinguish who is in the community and who is not. This is true for Christian community as well. Unfortunately, over the course of history, Christian communities have often done no better than other communities in preserving a clear sense of internal identity without becoming elitist or pugnacious. This is the tension that Miroslav Volf tackles in his important work, *Exclusion and Embrace*. He lays the groundwork upon which local communities can learn to form and pursue their mission with integrity. Our goal should be to "concentrate less on social arrangements and more on *fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just,*

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<sup>66</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 64–65. For greater elaboration see Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Princeton Review* (1909), 437–465, <http://journals.ptsem.edu/id/BR190973/dmd004> (accessed March 13, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 79.

*truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will live.*”<sup>68</sup> That is, members of Christian community should be learning to live in such a way that is not only internally consistent with their own identity as the people of God, but is also outwardly good for the larger society to which they also belong, if necessary either actively opposing evil or lovingly sacrificing our lives. The starting point for this kind of Christian community is the cross.<sup>69</sup> “The ‘wisdom of the Cross’...teaches that ultimately salvation does not come either from the ‘miracle’ of the right design or from the ‘wisdom’ of the final argument.”<sup>70</sup> The community we seek to form is not the organizational incarnation of a heavenly vision. Nor is it merely an ironclad ethic that can answer all questions. “At the core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures.”<sup>71</sup>

How does this change of ultimate loyalty impact the way we participate in our communities, Christian and otherwise? Volf begins by offering “two simple propositions. One: ‘Nobody stands nowhere.’ Two: ‘Most of us stand in more than one place.’”<sup>72</sup> That is, no one can claim to be free of membership in any community – each of us stands somewhere. Actually, most of are members of multiple communities. So, we must learn as Christians, how to live with integrity while maintaining these multiple important associations. At this point, Niebuhr’s typologies in *Christ and Culture* come quickly to mind.

But Volf warns us of two common sins as we learn to manage these multiple associations. He warns about distance, a detachment even from Christian heritage. “To leave

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<sup>68</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>69</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 207.

all tradition behind is not a requirement of rationality but a recipe for insanity.”<sup>73</sup> Distance leads to an indifference and elitism that normalizes many sorts of injustice. But as we are prone to withdraw from the cultures in which Christian communities reside, so too we are prone live with porous walls, indistinct boundaries, so that the difference between the culture at large and Christian community becomes indistinguishable.

Our coziness with the surrounding culture has made us so blind to many of its evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own versions of them – in God’s name and with a good conscience. . . . Churches [that] were foolish enough to think of themselves as masters [became] slaves to their cultures. . . .

The slide into complicity with what is evil in our culture would not be nearly as easy if the cultures did not so profoundly shape us. In a significant sense we are our cultures, and we find it therefore difficult to distance ourselves from the culture we inhabit in order to evaluate its various elements. The difficulty, however, makes the distancing from our own culture in the name of God of all cultures so much more urgent.<sup>74</sup>

Volf continues:

The answer lies. . . in cultivating the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to it. . . . The proper distance from a culture does not take Christians out of that culture. Christians are not the insiders who have taken flight to a new “Christian culture” and become outsiders of their own culture; rather when they have responded to the call of the Gospel they have stepped, as it were, with one foot outside their own culture while with the other remaining firmly planted in it. They are distant, and yet they belong. *Their difference is internal to the culture.*

The starting point for distinctly Christian community, Volf affirms, is placing the cross at the center in order to give supremely loyalty to the God of all cultures. From that center and priority, he then offers a nuanced application of the practice of freedom, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation. Within that framework we learn the proper relation between distance and belonging, exclusion and embrace.

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<sup>73</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 208.

<sup>74</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 36.

Gerhard Lohfink, in *Jesus and Community*, describes this tension between distance and belonging in terms of absorption and invisibility on the one hand and triumphalism on the other.

No one wishes to defend an ecclesiology of glory (*ecclesiologia gloriae*) any longer. In reaction to this, however, a diametrically opposite picture of the church has appeared – formulated initially by only a few theologians, but nesting in the subconscious of a much larger number of people. This idea envisions a completely invisible church, deeply embedded in human society, renouncing its own existence almost to the point of suicide, losing itself in the world in order to penetrate and transform everything. . . . This understanding of the church is marked by a profound embarrassment at the history of the church since Constantine as a dominating institution; it is also characterized by an aversion to elitist and triumphalist thought, a longing for solidarity with all of humanity, and a determination to avoid forever one error of the past, the identification of the church with the kingdom of God.

In part this image of the church is of course correct and indispensable: renunciation of all ecclesial triumphalism; desire for solidarity with all people of good will; rejection of a naïve identification of the church with the kingdom of God. The only question is if this reaction against an earlier triumphalism does not threaten to bring about a complete absorption of the church. Is not a serious illness of the present church – the fact that many Christian communities are hardly recognizable as communities and that Christians have increasingly accommodated themselves to the rest of society. . . . Is the idea that the church must immerse itself in the rest of society to the point of self-destruction really the right way to transform society? The gospel evidently takes a different position on this issue. (Mt 5:13-16)<sup>75</sup>

Lohfink draws on Jesus' metaphors for Christian community in the Gospels: salt, light, a city set on a hill. These are image of presence but not absorption – the salt is not to lose its savor but is to remain a lively seasoning; light is not to be extinguished by the darkness; and how can a city perched atop a hill not be visible from a great distance. "The church which is described here [Matt. 5] is anything but an elitist community which revolves around itself or cuts itself off from the world. . . . It is church for the world. *But it is all of this precisely by not becoming the world or by being dissolved in the world; it rather achieves this effect by preserving its own contours.*"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 64.

<sup>76</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 66.

The distinction that exists within Christian community results from transformation and mission. “Precisely to the degree that the people of God let itself be grasped by God’s rule it would be transformed – in all dimensions of its existence. It would become a contrast-society....It would become a family of brothers and sisters.”<sup>77</sup> This transformed community of God then becomes the agent by which God extends transformation to the whole earth. Lohfink argues that the commission of Christ to his people is not merely to teach all nations, but to “make all nations (communities of) disciples.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, “when the reign of God becomes present, its healing power must not only reach deeply into human corporeality but also extend deeply into the social dimension of human existence. It must free people for new community.”<sup>79</sup>

The salt must savor the palate, the light must invite to its warmth, the city must declare welcome and safety. So, says the devotional writer, Eberhard Arnold in *We Live in Community*, “we must live in community because God wants us to respond to the unclear longings of our time with a clear answer of truth.”<sup>80</sup> He says it even more strongly, “Life in community is no less than a necessity for us – it is an inescapable ‘must’ that determines everything we do and think....We must live in community because all of life created by God exists in a communal order and works toward community.”<sup>81</sup>

That ontology of community certainly reflects the vision of Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche community originally launched in France to care for people with disabilities. *Community and Growth* explains his understanding of community and is undoubtedly the most widely quoted discussion of Christian community among those people thinking seriously

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<sup>77</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 72.

<sup>78</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 136.

<sup>79</sup> Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 83.

<sup>80</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *Why We Live in Community* (Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1995), 7.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold, *Why We Live in Community*, 1.

about putting community into practice. While Vanier has in mind the formation of intentional communities within society like l'Arche, his challenge to form biblical, spiritual, nourishing Christian community applies seamlessly with the life of local congregations that aspire to be a community.

Vanier begins by quoting David Clark: "I have come to believe that without a strong sense of community human beings will wilt and begin to die. Community is the foundation of human society, the zenith of interdependence, the epitome of wholeness; in fact, the end of our journeying." Here is the outline of the mature life: the flourishing and completeness found in mutual submission and service sustains us for the whole of life, and indeed makes life whole. For Vanier, the trajectory of community follows the path of service.

"The question for every person and community is how to remain rooted in the soil of one's faith and one's identity, in one's own community, and at the same time to grow and give life to others, and to receive life from them."<sup>82</sup> The tension for living in community is between belonging and sacrifice, and the reluctance for many entering community is the "fear of losing one's identity."<sup>83</sup>

Community also poses the fear of discovery. Vanier says,

Community can be a terrible place, because it is a place of relationship; it is the revelation of our wounded emotions and how painful it can be to live with others.... When we are alone, we could believe we loved everyone. Now that we are with others, living with them all the time, we realize how incapable we are of loving, how much we deny to others, how closed in on ourselves we are.<sup>84</sup>

To be people gathered in response to the resurrection, means that Christian community has a mission of hope. Community itself "must be a sign of resurrection."<sup>85</sup> The spirit of a

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<sup>82</sup> Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 25-26.

<sup>85</sup> Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 196.

community is more than a way of life. It is “a hope, an incarnation of love.”<sup>86</sup> Michael

Austin, writing for the Evangelical Philosophical Society quotes Dallas Willard:

The gospel of the Kingdom will never make sense except as it is incarnated... in ordinary human beings in all ordinary conditions of human life. But it will make sense when janitors and storekeepers, carpenters and secretaries, businessmen and university professors, bankers and government officials brim with the degree of holiness and power formerly thought appropriate only to apostles and martyrs.<sup>87</sup>

For Vanier, the community is a place of uncommon commonness, a love of the ordinary,<sup>88</sup> and a patient, embodied belief that by God’s grace “people are always called to become more.”<sup>89</sup> The focus of community, having experienced God’s mercy, cannot keep such abundance to itself. A community that is Christian cannot withdraw or be indifferent. “A community that isolates itself will wither and die; a community in communion with others will receive and give life. This is the church, flowing over all of humanity and irrigating it.”<sup>90</sup> Here is the River of Life watering the desolation of this world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about Christian community in *Life Together* while facing the escalating tensions and increasing atrocities of war, during which time it was “not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians.”<sup>91</sup> Yet, hardship aside, it is essential to our identity as the people of God, not to retreat to the “seclusion of a cloistered life” but to advance into “the thick of the foes.”<sup>92</sup> Bonhoeffer writes of the fellowship of shared life with other Christians not as something assumed,

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<sup>86</sup> Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 151.

<sup>87</sup> Michael W. Austin, “Character, Vocation, and the Christian Academic,” The Evangelical Philosophical Society, 2014, <http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Austin%20%28CharacterVocation%29.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2014).

<sup>88</sup> “Before I became a Christian I do not think I fully realized that one’s life, after conversion, would inevitably consist in doing most of the same things one had been doing before conversion, one hopes, in a new spirit, but still the same things.” C.S. Lewis, “Learning in Wartime,” from *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 51.

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, “Learning in Wartime,” 23.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, “Learning in Wartime,” 103.

<sup>91</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1978), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 35.

<sup>92</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 43, Kindle.



accessible, or easy, but as a dimension of the Christian life and mission to be cultivated diligently in spite of hardship. Christians are called and “privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians.”<sup>93</sup> Christians belong to one another and need one another because of Jesus Christ. “A Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.”<sup>94</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s situation under German Nazism is not unlike that of many Christians world-wide who do not have the luxury of having many Christian friends with whom to share community, or of having the political or economic liberty to form community. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer insists, community is still a part of our lives as Christians, and we must pursue it even if only elements of community are within our grasp. Community is in our nature in Christ and essential to our mission.

### Life and Death

True spiritual communities, informed by the gospel, reshape how we think of the meaning and outcome of our lives. “The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I shall die, and the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, shall be raised on the Last Day. Our salvation is ‘external to ourselves’. I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 57, Kindle.

<sup>94</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 115, Kindle.

<sup>95</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 551, Kindle.

## Prayer

The psalms teach us to pray as a fellowship. The body of Christ is praying, and as an individual one acknowledges that his prayer is only a minute fragment of the whole prayer of the church. He learns to pray the prayer of the body of Christ. And that lifts him above his personal concerns and allows him to pray selflessly.<sup>96</sup>

## Song

It is the voice of the Church that is heard in singing together. It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song. Thus all singing together that is right must serve to widen our spiritual horizon, make us see our little company as a member of the great Christian Church on earth, and help us willingly and gladly to join our singing, be it feeble or good, to the song of the Church.<sup>97</sup>

Larry Crabb says in *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, that “churches are rarely communities.”<sup>98</sup> We have to learn what it means to be a community. Crabb cites Henri Nouwen, who gave his final years to life and ministry with l’Arche: Spiritual community is “a safe place to hit bottom”<sup>99</sup> and discover that “we are not our problems. We are not our wounds. We are not our sins.”<sup>100</sup> But in community we learn to begin again, starting by reorienting our lives together around fellowship with the Triune God.

Julie Gorman, in *Community that Is Christian*, picks up on the Trinitarian character of Christian community when she quotes Neil Plantinga:

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<sup>96</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 657ff, Kindle.

<sup>97</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Location 651, Kindle.

<sup>98</sup> Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What the Church Can Be* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), xiv.

<sup>99</sup> Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, 161.

<sup>100</sup> Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, 34.

Christian believers can see some of the striking implications of social Trinity theory. First, the confession that we are created in the image of God begins to resonate with new overtones. In our fellowship and *koinonia*, in such homely endeavors as telling one another the truth or in doing such honest work as will help those in need – “above all in that love which binds everything together in perfect harmony” – we show not only that we have become members of one another, but also that we as restored community, we-in-the-plural, have become a remarkable image of God.<sup>101</sup>

Lastly, Christine Pohl offers two books that address practices of community that make community accessible, winsome, and enduring. *Making Room* is devoted to the first practice of hospitality. *Living into Community* deals with three other practices: gratitude, promise-making, and truthfulness. These practices are much like Tocqueville’s “habits of the heart,” those qualities of character that emerge from the deep longing of the human spirit, qualities which help make the identity of Christian community distinct while leaving the doors open and the walls transparent.

### Hospitality

“In offering hospitality, [we] live between the vision of God’s kingdom in which there is enough, even abundance, and the hard realities of human life in which doors are closed and locked, and some needy people are turned away or left outside.”<sup>102</sup> She quotes Vanier, “A community which refuses to welcome – whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors – is dying spiritually.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Julie A. Gorman, *Community That Is Christian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 25.

<sup>102</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 131.

<sup>103</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 160.

## Gratitude

Gratitude begins as a response in worship to God for his grace. If he has been abundantly gracious and merciful to us, how can we refuse to offer his grace to others?

## Promise-making

God is the God of covenant, who swears by the blood of his Son that he will be faithful and present, that he will forgive and welcome, that he will reward and bless, and that he will make all things right and new. In turn, we who are in covenant with God vow to keep the bonds of community.

## Truthfulness

In the community of God's people, the word of God is proclaimed and the good news of the gospel announced to all. As the Spirit of God shines his light upon our hearts, we confess our sins, we affirm forgiveness, and with transparency, honesty, and humility we speak to one another as before the face of God.

Pohl quotes Robert Webber:

“The church is the primary presence of God's activity in the world. As we pay attention to what it means to be the church we create an alternative community to the society of the world. This new community, the embodied experience of God's Kingdom, will draw people into itself and nurture them in the faith. In this sense the church and its life in the world will become the new apologetic.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 160.

## The Church and Mission

The recent pastoral and scholarly work on the mission of the church has emerged as a continuation of the summons issued by missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin. *His Foolishness to the Greeks* and *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* launched a now mature conversation among missiologists and church leaders about recalibrating the mission of the church. The twentieth century ended with at least two significant missiological realities: Christianity is a worldwide movement, and the global landscape for the work of missions has been dramatically re-ordered. The missiological consensus that Newbigin focused on our situation may be summarized with the term *mission Dei*, ‘the mission of God.’<sup>105</sup>

Darrell Guder, in *Missional Church*, has led a team of missiologists in responding to Newbigin’s challenge. They begin by mapping the contours of change that have formed our current situation. The rise of empiricism through the influence of John Locke socially and politically has reshaped epistemology and limited sources of knowledge to human experience. The center of individual identity has been shifted to freedom and self-expression. Society then, according to social contract theory would be re-ordered based on the impulses of freedom and rationality.<sup>106</sup> With truth having been relativized, self having been decentered, and society pluralized, the church now has the challenge of affirming our gospel mission in this new context.<sup>107</sup> We are faced with the reality that “much of the church culture... built up over a period of two hundred years” has either collapsed or been substantially eroded.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

<sup>106</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 21-25.

<sup>107</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 40-45.

<sup>108</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 54.

Two things have become quite clear to those who care about the church and its mission. On the one hand, the churches of North America have been dislocated from their prior social role of chaplain to the culture and society and have lost their once privileged position of influence....At the same time, the churches have become so accommodated to the American way of life that they are now domesticated, and it is no longer obvious what justifies their existence as particular communities.<sup>109</sup>

The truth and reality of the kingdom of God are at the core of the mission of the church. But what is the kingdom of God and how is it experienced? Much of the emphasis over the past several hundred years has been on extending and establishing the kingdom of God. Consequently, these efforts had strong organizational and often political overtones. But those following Newbigin now emphasize that the kingdom of God is to be received and welcomed, a strategy marked by community and trust. "Before the church is called to do or say anything, it is called to *be* [emphasis added] the unique community of those who live under the reign of God."<sup>110</sup> Consequently, as we

live under God's reign, our involvements with the world will be repatternd....Announcing the reign of God comes as a spontaneous expression of gratitude, humility, and joy when it occurs in the context of being the forgiven community that embodies the divine reign and signals its character in actions of compassion, justice, and peace.<sup>111</sup>

Guder then identifies three facets of the church's mission:

First... churches must revive what it means to be communities of the reign of God.

Second... churches must discover what it means to act faithfully on behalf of the reign of God within the public life of their society.

Third... churches must learn to speak in post-Christendom accents as confident yet humble messengers of the reign of God.<sup>112</sup>

How is such a missional culture formed? Guder begins with an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit bringing salvation, change, and gifts – prayer is vital. Important, too, are the sacraments framed as covenantal commissions that demand and proclaim forgiveness and

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<sup>109</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 78.

<sup>110</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 103.

<sup>111</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 105, 107.

<sup>112</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 108-109.

reconciliation. Hospitality invites peace, trust, and accountability. But no culture can happen merely organically – mission requires leadership, but a kind of leadership well-suited to the mission. Missional leadership needs to invite people to Jesus by placing him at the center of life. This is the “centered set” strategy that clears the way for people to have free access to the Saviour. Missional leadership also needs to have eschatological vision – hope. Also, creational wisdom – what is the world for, how is it good, what is our place in it. “Above all, the public worship of the mission community always leads to the pivotal act of sending.”<sup>113</sup>

Guder has published a small monograph, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, which offers some rich elaboration on the broad landscape presented in *Missional Church*. “The first form of Christian witness before a watching world is the embodied love of Christ at work visibly in his church.”<sup>114</sup> This is “God’s strategy for making good news known to the world.”<sup>115</sup>

The incarnational witness of the community is not sinless, but rather embodies the reality of grace in its contrition, repentance, and forgiveness. Like the individual Christian, the incarnational community lives and testifies as a people who are *simul Justus et peccator* (simultaneously justified and sinners – Martin Luther). What the world should experience in the church is not perfect Christians, but honest Christians whose lives enflesh the real possibility of new life, a new creation, living hope, and confidence that “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).<sup>116</sup>

Adopting this vision of mission for the church does not come easily.

As we struggle to develop a missional theology for the West, there are two major challenges raised for us by the communal character of incarnational witness.

First, incarnational missions is a challenge to the institutional church of Christendom, in all its forms. If Christ’s calling defines the church’s purpose, and if the called community is to incarnate the good news, then, to put it bluntly, neither the institution’s existence nor its maintenance is to be its priority....The formation of the church and the salvation of its members are the “first fruits” of God’s desire for all creation....

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<sup>113</sup> Guder, *Missional Church*, 243.

<sup>114</sup> Darrell Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 42.

<sup>115</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 21.

<sup>116</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 23.

Second, incarnational mission is a challenge to the individualism that dominates Western culture. If the gospel can be incarnated only in and through a community, then the individual Christian must be defined and understood in terms of his or her membership in that community. The individual Christian is constitutionally dependent: he or she is part of an organic whole that lives and functions only as all its parts exercise their mutual interdependence. This does not discount the distinctive gospel experience of the individual Christian. But that experience is rooted in God's preceding action through the community and must enrich that community.<sup>117</sup>

Incarnational witness will endeavor to

translate the gospel into the distinctive life experience of the secularized self-indulgent American teenager, the skeptical and experimenting college student, the career-driven young professional, as well as the marginalized poor whose numbers are growing in our economy.

This is no easy task, and it is fraught with risks. Every translation is necessarily a reduction, but when such reductions become absolute ideologies, then they are antievangelical reductionisms. The challenge is always to translate in such a way that the transforming power of the gospel not only is expressed in a given cultural context, but also challenges that context to change so that it can incarnate Christ.<sup>118</sup>

Our mission is for God's love in Christ to be incarnated in every culture.<sup>119</sup>

Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God* provides an eloquent biblical foundation upon which we can live out and incarnate the community God has called his people to be. Then, in *The Mission of God's People*, he maps out in the form a discipleship guide what it means to embody and enact the mission of God. Wright says that to understand the mission of God's people, we must first understand the mission of God which he outlines in this way:

*What is God's ultimate mission?* To bring about the blessing of the nations, as he promised to Abraham (mission).

*How will that be achieved?* By the existence in the world of a community that will be taught to live according to the way of the Lord in righteousness and justice (ethics).

*But how will such a community come into existence?* Because God chose Abraham to be its founding father (election).<sup>120</sup>

Wright places great emphasis on the command of God to his people in exile. The exilic metaphor persists throughout redemptive history and remains a powerful description of the

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<sup>117</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 25-26.

<sup>118</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 53.

<sup>119</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*, 51.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 93.



Christian community in the world today. Jeremiah 29:7 – “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” This is the mission of God’s people.

While Wright discusses themes common to others writing on mission and community (reconciliation, justice, holiness, truth), he connects the embodiment of our mission to our creational identity. God made us to work. This means, quoting Dave Bookless, that “the good news does not begin with Jesus’ birth. It begins with the good earth that God made through Jesus.”<sup>121</sup>

This then, is the mission of God’s people: “To live as those who have experienced that redeeming power of God already, and whose lives – individual and corporate – are signposts to the ultimate liberation of all creation and humanity from every form of oppression and slavery.”<sup>122</sup>

Translated to everyday life, this means that “the citizens of God’s city are the best possible citizens of their earthly cities.”<sup>123</sup> Amy Sherman opens *Kingdom Calling* with this quotation by Tim Keller as she points us to Proverbs 11:10 – “When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices.” The community of God works out its life in the city of man by first attending to righteousness – a restored relationship to God through Christ, and then through an incarnation of Christ’s character in all we say and do. In short, the best way to love our neighbors is to love God most. Every area of life, all our relationships and responsibilities are occasions to demonstrate the *shalom* of the kingdom: peace with God, peace with self, peace with others, peace with creation.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 112.

<sup>123</sup> Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 27.

<sup>124</sup> Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 34.

Quoting N.T. Wright, “[Christians] are not just to be a sign and foretaste of [the] ultimate salvation: *they are to be part of the means by which God makes this happen in both the present and the future.*”<sup>125</sup> This means that “vocation is integral, not incidental, to the mission of God in the world” (Steve Garber)<sup>126</sup> Work, our work, the work we consider mundane and important, is an outworking of the mission of God’s people.

Sherman offers a framework for churches to begin thinking about how the mission of God’s people can be given local legs. She is responding to the challenge of James Davison Hunter in *To Change the World*:

The church is to go into all realms of social life: in volunteer and paid labor – skilled and unskilled labor, the crafts, engineering, commerce, art, law architecture, teaching health, and service. Indeed the church should be sending people out in these realms – not only discipling them in these fields by providing the theological resources to form them well, but...mentoring...and supporting [them]...in these vocations. When the church does not send people to these realms and when it does not provide the theologies that make sense of work and engagement in these realms, the church fails to fulfill the charge to “go into all the world.”<sup>127</sup>

### **The Church and Calling**

This dissertation builds on the work of James Davison Hunter and his view of calling (“faithful presence”) expressed in *To Change the World*. Hunter’s view of calling connects church, mission, community, creation, covenant, and work – all the themes addressed in this dissertation. As his title suggests, he is interested in exploring the impact Christians do or should have on the world. Toward what goal should we be living as the community of God’s

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<sup>125</sup> Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 86.

<sup>126</sup> Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 101.

<sup>127</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 257. Hunter footnotes a remark by Richard Horner, “We are to assume the going into all spheres of life where we are to make disciples of all sorts of people.” (334).

people enacting the mission of God? What kind of cultural and redemptive change should the church expect to observe when Christians attend faithfully to their calling?

Hunter examines culture as creativity and coherence. Creativity: culture is what we make the world to be, how we have cultivated the world through our skill and imagination, how we have ordered and arranged the world to enable it to flourish. Coherence: culture is the sense we make of the world, the rhyme and reason we assign to the way the world is.

Has the world changed? Have we changed? Hunter observes that the “spiritual, political, and social tactics”<sup>128</sup> employed by Christians throughout history have not produced the cultural change promised by their champions. Unfortunately, many of these promised changes were tied to commitments to particular views of Christian mission and the kingdom of God.

He observes that not only is culture “profoundly resistant to intentional change”<sup>129</sup> of the sort engineered by charismatic leaders and motivated movements, but also that cultural change follows the influence of societal networks and structures. Hunter’s point is not that Christians should seek to become the elite of these networks (although such an elite does exist *de facto*), but that societal networks provide a comprehensive framework for cultural involvement. Following the creation mandate and by virtue of these networks, Christians should be everywhere and in every area of culture. The opportunities for Christians to invest their lives in the whole of the world for the glory of God are super-abundant.

Hunter argues that what we take as reality in the late modern world is being dissolved by the “weakening significance of presence and place.”<sup>130</sup> Our understanding and experience of our significance in life are becoming less and less defined by physical contact and location.

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<sup>128</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 45.

<sup>130</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 238ff.

As a result the word of God and the world of God are becoming increasingly separate realities. In Hunter's idea of "faithful presence" word and world come together through the word's enactments – not only *the fact* that God's word is always enacted but also in *the way* his word is enacted."<sup>131</sup> He continues:

At root, a theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God's faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return....When the Word of all flourishing – defined by the love of Christ – becomes flesh in us, in our relations with others, within the tasks we are given, and within our sphere of influence – absence gives way to presence, and the word we speak to each other and to the world becomes authentic and trustworthy. This is the heart of a theology of presence.<sup>132</sup>

More than the mere practice (although it is no small thing) of faithful presence is the role of leadership in cultivating a community that practices faithful presence. Hunter charges the leaders of the church, first of all, actively to send God's people into every area of life (per Matthew 28:19) – faithfulness presupposes presence. Second, it is the task of Christian leadership to cultivate a covenant community committed to faith, hope, and love. "The practice of faithful presence, then, generates relationships and institutions that are fundamentally covenantal in character, the ends of which are the fostering of meaning, purpose, truth, beauty, belonging, and fairness – not just for Christians but for everyone."<sup>133</sup>

The papal encyclical of John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, offers a thoughtful articulate survey of work and purpose, ideas foundational to calling. Work is "as old as man and his life on earth,"<sup>134</sup> John Paul II writes, and unites us to God's purpose in creation. Work is a spiritual activity in that God's Spirit employs us to carry out God's mission in the world. Furthermore, by the Spirit's presence and as God's workers, we are changed and brought

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<sup>131</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241.

<sup>132</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243, 252.

<sup>133</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*, 263.

<sup>134</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, 4, [http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/laborem\\_exercens.pdf](http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/laborem_exercens.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2013).

closer to God.<sup>135</sup> Because our lives as workers are joined to God's working in the world, "work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being.'"<sup>136</sup> Our vocational commitment to work, our taking up work as God's calling, means that we are "more stringently bound" to "build up the world," seek the welfare of our fellow humans.<sup>137</sup>

Even by their secular activity [Christians] must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace....Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word.<sup>138</sup>

Christian literature has long been replete with counsel on doing God's will and answering the rather recent question, "What does God want me to do with my life?" William Diehl, a businessman earnest about making a more integral connection between his work and his Christian faith, wrote *The Monday Connection* and *In Search of Faithfulness*. He wanted more coherent answers that made a connection between Sunday and Monday, between worship and work. He quotes Gregory Pierce, "A spirituality of work necessitates orienting ourselves toward the divine through our daily activity of improving and sustaining the world."<sup>139</sup> From there, he goes on to think carefully about individualism, community, ethics, stewardship, time, priorities, character, mercy, justice, all of which are connected to our everyday work and which are expressions of our faith in Christ and the presence of God's kingdom.

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<sup>135</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 50.

<sup>136</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 18-19.

<sup>137</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 52.

<sup>138</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 53.

<sup>139</sup> William Diehl, *The Monday Connection: A Spirituality of Competence, Affirmation, and Support in the Workplace* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 29.

We have to get over this nonsense that the call to the ordained ministry is a “higher” call than the call to laypersons. There is *one* call – the call to all God’s people – and, therefore, there is but one vocation: to be the people of God. With all due respect to my own bishop, whom I greatly admire, and with all due respect to all those wonderful, dedicated pastors whose lives I admire, I must protest the use of their reference to a “special call” to the ordained ministry, because that word ‘special’ is meant to mean “higher.”<sup>140</sup>

Os Guinness offers a thoughtful and multi-faceted meditation on calling in *The Call*. He frames our understanding of calling with foundational clarity. “Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.”<sup>141</sup> Guinness elaborates. “Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia).”<sup>142</sup> This priority in calling is critical. Calling begins when we are called to God in Christ. But Guinness continues. “Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him.”<sup>143</sup> Guinness echoes Hunter who, in urging us to practice faithful presence, calls us to live out our supreme loyalty to God (we love him most and best) in every circumstance of life. Love for God is the prerequisite for love of neighbor in the scheme of Christian mission, and nothing authenticates our love for God more than love for our neighbors.

Gene Veith, in *God at Work*, champions work as worship. “*The priesthood of all believers* did not make everyone into church workers; rather, it turned every kind of work into a sacred

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<sup>140</sup> William Diehl, *In Search of Faithfulness: Lessons from the Christian Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>141</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: The W Publishing Group, 1998), 4.

<sup>142</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 31.

<sup>143</sup> Guinness, *The Call*, 31.

calling.”<sup>144</sup> He explores the biblical texts on work, calling, and vocation to emphasize that every area of life is connected to our identity and calling as Christians in the body of Christ.

Andy Crouch, in *Culture Making*, moves the conversation about calling in a profoundly creational direction by bringing calling and creativity together. In diagnosing culture (and our part in it), Crouch thinks in terms of artifacts – the stuff of the material cosmos, the things we handle. He asks five questions:

What does this cultural artifact assume about the way the world is?  
What does this cultural artifact assume about the way the world should be?  
What does this cultural artifact make possible?  
What does this cultural artifact make impossible (or at least very difficult)?  
What new forms of culture are created in response to this artifact?<sup>145</sup>

Pitching culture in this way means that culture and our participation in culture is not optional. Cultural engagement and the mission of God come down to brewing a pot of coffee or cutting your grass. Culture is more than a world view, more than a way of seeing. “Culture helps us behave ourselves into new ways of thinking.”<sup>146</sup>

Since culture begins with God and creation, culture making, Crouch reasons, mimics God and affirms the call to creativity given to God’s image bearers in the beginning. Therefore, creation is relational, requires cultivation, and leads to celebration. “So, where are we called to create culture? At the intersection of grace and cross.” Or, as Frederick Buechner says, “where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>147</sup>

With Tim Keller’s, *Every Good Endeavor*, work, vocation, and calling find their center in the gospel.<sup>148</sup> First, the dignity of work is rooted in creation. Keller quotes Wolters:

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<sup>144</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 19.

<sup>145</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 29-30.

<sup>146</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, 64.

<sup>147</sup> Crouch, *Culture Making*, 262-263.

<sup>148</sup> “The church is the bearer to all the nations of a gospel that announces the kingdom, the reign, and the sovereignty of God. It calls men and women to repent of their false loyalty to other powers, to become

The earth had been completely unformed and empty; in the six-day process of development God had formed it and filled it – but not completely. People must now carry on the work of development: by being fruitful they fill it even more; by subduing it they must form it even more...as God’s representatives, [we] carry on where God left off. But this is now to be a *human* development of the earth. The human race will fill the earth with its own kind, and it will form the earth for its own kind. From now on the development of the created earth will be *societal* and *cultural* in nature.<sup>149</sup>

Since sin now corrupts both the work and the worker, calling begins with a gospel realignment. Idolatry has shifted the goal of our work away from the glory of God and toward a destruction of the creation. But the gospel offers hope that things can change.

First, the gospel provides an alternate story line for our work....

Second, the Christian faith gives us a new and rich conception of work as partnering with God in his love and care for the world....

Third, the gospel gives us a particularly sensitive new moral compass....

Finally, the gospel radically changes our motives for work and fills us with a new and durable inner power.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, Miroslav Volf suggests that our understanding of vocation and calling be “developed within the framework of the doctrine of last things.”<sup>151</sup> Jesus’s command to “seek first the Kingdom of God”<sup>152</sup> is an eschatological statement, a call to live toward and in the confidence of the world made new. Work, then, derives its ultimate meaning when it corresponds to the new creation,<sup>153</sup> when it is done in cooperation with the movement of God in history and the world by the power and gifting of his Spirit. “When God calls people to become children of God, the Spirit gives them callings, talents, and “enabling” (charisms) so that they can do God’s will in the Christian fellowship and in the world in anticipation of

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believers in the one true sovereignty, and so to become corporately a sign, instrument, and foretaste of that sovereignty of the one true and living God over all nature, all nations, and all human lives. It is not meant to call men and women out of the world into a safe religious enclave but to call them out in order to send them back as agents of God’s kingdom.” Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 124.

<sup>149</sup> Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 58.

<sup>150</sup> Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 151.

<sup>151</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), ix.

<sup>152</sup> Matt 6:33.

<sup>153</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 121.



God's eschatological new creation."<sup>154</sup> Since God is at work in every part of creation<sup>155</sup> in movement toward the consummation, "the deepest meaning of human work lies in the cooperation of men and women with God."<sup>156</sup> Cooperation with God in the Spirit addresses the deepest need of the human condition – alienation from others, from self, from the world, but ultimately from God. "The full humanization of work requires overcoming alienation from God. For work to be humanized, the working person must be 'humanized' not least by nurturing her right relation to God."<sup>157</sup> This means, Volf argues, that "a theology of work based on the concept of a new creation needs to be *comprehensive*,... an all-encompassing eschatology"<sup>158</sup> that longs for and works toward a transformation of every part of our selves and every part of the world by the power and gifting of the Spirit.

Perhaps the most profound writing on work and calling comes from a short essay by Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" It is as widely and frequently mined for its wisdom on work as is Vanier's work on community and Tocqueville's on individualism. Sayers speaks personally and practically to what God would have us be and do as his image bearers. She begins by rooting work in creation.

Work is the natural exercise and function of man – the creature who is made in the image of his Creator....Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It should be the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 124.

<sup>155</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118. Volf cites Basil of Caesarea who "observes in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, that creation possesses nothing – no power, no motivation, or ingenuity needed for work – that it did not receive from the Spirit of God," and Calvin: "It is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and earth."... The Spirit transfuses "into all things his energy" and breathes "into them essence, life, and movement" (144).

<sup>156</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 98.

<sup>157</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 163.

<sup>158</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 84-85.

<sup>159</sup> Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1949).

She comments on the role of the church in teaching Christians to work well as part of faithful Christian living.

It is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred. Christian people must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work, that is as true a vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work.... In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.... Work must be good work before it can call itself God's work.<sup>160</sup>

Also, she comments on personal attitudes toward work as she advocates for a missional vision of work.

Every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade – not outside it. The Apostles complained rightly when they said it was not meet they should leave the word of God and serve tables; their vocation was to preach the word. But the person whose vocation it is to prepare the meals beautifully might with equal justice protest: It is not meet for us to leave the service of our tables to preach the word....

Let the Church see to it that the workers are Christian people and do their work well, as to God: then all the work will be Christian work, whether it is church embroidery or sewage farming. As Jacques Maritain says: "If you want to produce Christian work, be a Christian, and try to make a work of beauty into which you have put your heart; do not adopt a Christian pose."...

The only true way of serving the community is to be truly in sympathy with [that is, have love for] the community, to be oneself part of the community and then to serve the work without giving the community another thought. Then the work will endure, because it will be true to itself. It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work.... If work is to find its right place in the world, it is the duty of the Church to see to it that the work serves God, and that the worker serves the work.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Sayers, "Why Work?"

<sup>161</sup> Sayers, "Why Work?"

## THE LOCAL CONGREGATION AND FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Steve Garber, in *Fabric of Faithfulness*, asks the question, “How does a worldview become a way of life?”<sup>162</sup> That is a question central to the purpose of this dissertation. How do we learn how we will live? Far too often the learning is unconscious or incoherent. But it sticks nonetheless. Garber remains a faithful guide in his newly released *Visions of Vocations*, teaching by story so that we may learn by example the principles of faithful presence, and learn to value deeply those around us who work well. This dissertation asks not only “how” but also “where” do we learn this way of life? David Brooks is one of many social observers who believes that “We become who we are in conjunction with other people becoming who they are.”<sup>163</sup> We learn in community as humans and in Christian community engaged with the world as a gospel-centered incarnation of the mission of God.

Doug Webster, a scholar-pastor, has written *Soulcraft*. It is not a book about vocation, work, and calling *per se*, but it is a wise and deeply-rooted study of how we learn to bear God’s image better. Therefore, what he says bears significantly on how we learn about faith and work. He begins “in the beginning.”

Where we begin makes all the difference; it determines what world we live in – a world of our making or the world of God’s creating. The world of our making is filled with idols, chaos, and darkness. But the world of God’s creating is filled with wisdom, order, and light. Apart from God our personal world remains in chaos, darkness, and nothingness.<sup>164</sup>

While Webster guides us toward the kind of growth and maturity that cultivates solid, lively, missional community, he reminds us that “self-work is not a human achievement but a

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<sup>162</sup> Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 47.

<sup>163</sup> David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011), xvi.

<sup>164</sup> Doug Webster, *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us Through Relationships* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 34.

divine endowment. We are made in the image of God, which means we are made for communion and community, for rational reflection and righteous obedience,<sup>165</sup> for worship and work. We are called into a personal face-to-face relationship with God and with one another.”<sup>165</sup>

*The Good and Beautiful Community* by James Bryan Smith comes from the Renovaré network of resources that focuses on spiritual formation. Smith touches on many of the significant elements of Christian community – hope, service, reconciliation, generosity, worship – but he adds a useful pedagogical component that helps us practice our way to growth. Each lesson is accompanied by simple but practical learning exercises to discover how to implement and experience each aspect of community formation. Much like Webster, Smith regards his study as training for the soul, learning that enriches community and mission.

In *The Gospel-Centered Community*, Robert Thune and Will Walker, much like Keller’s approach to work, take the gospel as their starting point to teach us how to live in community. The big sweep of this small-group study begins in creation and ends in mission. Along the way, they discuss themes like individualism as a destroyer of community – how can we detect it, and how does the gospel move us away from self-centeredness to focus on God and others. Other themes include brokenness, honesty, humility, forgiveness, and joy. Their premise is that as the gospel changes us personally, the community changes so that we may more effectively proclaim the gospel to the nations.

Tod Bolsinger is a pastor who has thought about how work, mission, and community come together in the congregation he serves. He’s written *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian*, and he believes strongly in the pedagogical power of the local church to teach its

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<sup>165</sup> Webster, *Soulcraft*, 42.

members how to live in community. Here is his premise: “if you desire a transformed life, you must be transformed within the church. If you desire to be a changed people, you must change the church. If you would find your life you must lose it within a redeemed and redemptive community that together lives the manner of abundant and exceptional life that God intended for us.”<sup>166</sup>

He recognizes the fragmentation and individualism that erode the unity of his congregation. The first step in forging new community, in his mind, is a return to the doctrine of the Trinity. “Christian transformation comes through the pattern, the personal relationship, and the power of God to the believer found in Jesus Christ through the Spirit experienced within the community.”<sup>167</sup> He continues: “By recovering a spiritual theology of the Trinity, we will recover a relational-sacramental spirituality that *begins in community and transforms the disciple of Christ through a living communion with Christ serving as witness to the activity of the Triune God in the world.*”<sup>168</sup>

Bolsinger then considers how a community formed and informed by the Trinity will transform elements of congregational life: worship, preaching, sacraments, wisdom, and service. He concludes: “It is the life of the community that is itself transformed by God and participates in God’s own ministry of loving and saving the world.”<sup>169</sup>

*Work Matters*, by Tom Nelson, deepens the conversation about the relationship between congregational discipleship and work in the world. He affirms that the Christian community stands in “continuity between God’s original creation and the new creation.”<sup>170</sup> This is a Triune engagement with our work and God’s work. “There is a sense in which all human

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<sup>166</sup> Tod E. Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Our Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press: 2004), 18.

<sup>167</sup> Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian*, 57.

<sup>168</sup> Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian*, 80-81.

<sup>169</sup> Bolsinger, *It Takes a church to Raise a Christian*, 157.

<sup>170</sup> Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), Location 955, Kindle.

work is done in the power of the Spirit. . . .When human beings work, they work only because God's Spirit has given them the power and the talents to work."<sup>171</sup> Therefore, if our work is to be united with the work of God, (quoting Newbigin) "The congregation has to be a place where its members are trained, supported, and nourished in the exercise of their parts of the priestly ministry in the world. The preaching and teaching of the local church has to be such that it enables members to think out the problems that face them in their secular work in light of their Christian faith."<sup>172</sup>

Working in the world and living out our callings in culture challenges us to think about what R. Paul Stevens in *Doing God's Business* calls "marketplace spirituality."<sup>173</sup> Work cannot be reduced to the isolated activities of individuals – we all work together in some way, and therefore must (if we are to work Christianly) think about how our work contributes to the structures of culture in which we work. Drawing from the practice of Jubilee in the Old Testament, Stevens suggests principles of land ownership, debt, employment to which leaders must give attention in shaping the culture in which we work, seek human flourishing, and anticipate the shalom of the world made new. Leaders who seek shalom face a "multi-leveled resistance" identified in historic theology as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Leaders attentive to shaping the environment of and structures within which we work must

deal with the world by non-conformity (Romans 12:12) yet loving the world as God does. They deal with fallen structures by engagement and transformation, making a difference where they can by participation and sometimes by non-violent suffering. They deal with the flesh by crucifying the flesh (not the body but life lived without God and turned in on oneself) and by walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:24-25). They deal with the devil by the Word and prayer.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Nelson, *Work Matters*, Location 2065, Kindle.

<sup>172</sup> Nelson, *Work Matters*, Location 2611, Kindle.

<sup>173</sup> R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 226.

<sup>174</sup> Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, Location 4014, Kindle.

Like much of Martin Luther's seminal contributions, central to the transformational impact of Reformational teaching on calling and vocation, a sermon by C.S. Lewis thinks through questions at the heart of the notion of *faithful presence*. "Learning in Wartime" was delivered to students at Oxford during World War II. With air raid sirens going off every day, the students trying to get on with learning Byron and botany were asking, "Shouldn't we be doing something more important?" It is the same questions thoughtful Christians ask about their mundane ordinary lives that at first blush seem far removed from the importance and glory of the kingdom of God. Why bother with culture<sup>175</sup> and the stuff of this world? Or, with the realities of mortality and finiteness coiling about us, "What is the use of beginning a task which we have so little chance of finishing?"<sup>176</sup> Lewis affirms even in the face of war and the enormities of life's pressures that do their best to convince us to separate creation from redemption, we are to press on to live every area of life to the glory of God. "We can therefore pursue knowledge as such, and beauty as such, in the sure confidence that by so doing we are either advancing to the vision of God ourselves or indirectly helping others to do so." It is easy to concern ourselves too much "with their ultimate relevance to the vision of God. That relevance may not be intended for us but for our betters – for men who come after and find the spiritual significance of what we dug out in blind and humble obedience to our vocation."<sup>177</sup> But Lewis concludes, "If we thought that for some souls, and at some times, the life of learning [or any other vocation], humbly offered to God, was, in its own small way, one of the appointed approaches to the Divine reality and the Divine beauty which hope to enjoy hereafter, we can think so still."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Steven Froehlich, "Why Bother with Culture?" *Critique* (July 01, 2007), <http://ransomfellowship.org/article/detail.asp?AID=305&B=Steve%20Froehlich&TID=7> (accessed November 18, 2012).

<sup>176</sup> Lewis, "Learning in Wartime," 47.

<sup>177</sup> Lewis, "Learning in Wartime," 56-57.

<sup>178</sup> Lewis, "Learning in Wartime," 63.

While not an exhaustive survey of literature supporting the ideas and propositions of this dissertation, these resources are proving foundational and formative in exploring how community formation shapes the understanding and practice of calling.



FAITHFUL PRESENCE: HOW COMMUNITY FORMATION SHAPES  
THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF CALLING

A THESIS-PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
STEVEN D. FROEHLICH

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMPLEMENTATION: OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*It is this supposed self-sufficiency of the modern self that sets it in opposition  
both to socialization in human community and to dependence on God.*

Richard Bauckham<sup>1</sup>

The exploration of calling and community lead to this question: How do we put into practice the commitment of New Life Presbyterian Church (NLPC) to faithful presence? The narrative overview of this chapter, which suggests some answers to that question, consists of two sections. First, *observation*. If the diagnostic evaluation that introduced this project is accurate, then we should be able to draw together some observations that lead to the second section comprised of some more specific *recommendations* and action items. Any overlap between these two sections hopefully will result in helpful elaboration and more complete application. One reason for the overlap is that enacting the mission of God as the practice of faithful presence is an imprecise process for which there is no formula. The *missio Dei* is a learned way of life and a cultivated way of seeing that understands that the pathway to Christ for many of our post-Christian neighbors will call us not only to patient, loving relationships, but also (apart from Spirit-breathed revival) to a very long journey toward understanding, agreement, and trust. Or, to describe the journey using different categories, toward interest, plausibility, and faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 195.

## PRESUPPOSITIONS

The focus of this project is the intersection of community formation and calling. One presupposition motivating the thesis is that too many evangelical congregations, mirroring the culture at large, have lost an understanding of and a commitment to the practice of community. Strong forces at work in the way we live in the West in general and in America in particular have dramatically diminished the congregation's role and influence in the task of spiritual formation. Specifically, the loss of community has weakened congregational discipleship and the nurtured understanding of how believers respond to God's calling upon their lives.<sup>2</sup>

Another presupposition of this project is that the focus of calling as understood by many Christians has effectively shifted from God's mission to personal fulfillment. Calling is too often associated with a decision-oriented quest to discover "God's will for me" instead of a life-long path of participation in God's purpose for creation in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Calling is most commonly expressed in our work or vocation, which, Calvin argues, "is the principal part of human life and the part that means most to God."<sup>4</sup> The mission of God is about work as a way of life that longs for and catapults from Sabbath like the gravitational pull of the Sun upon the Earth. If NLPC is a missional congregation, people will gather like a beam of light to a prism, to pass through and be scattered in all the brilliance of the gospel in the full spectrum of life and into every area of culture.

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<sup>2</sup> "Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period." James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 15.

<sup>3</sup> "Vocational discernment is a life-long process. Many factors contribute to a life direction – personal passion, motivation, gifts and talents, circumstances, compulsions and dysfunctions, and sometimes, a direct word from God, location.... At every stage of life, but particularly at crucial transitions, we are challenged to rediscover vocation and to go deeper." R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 2703.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, trans. B.W. Farley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 78.

Therefore, the goal of this project is to identify and recommend practices within the life of a local congregation that will stimulate the formation of a Christian community that more earnestly encourages and more effectively equips Christians to practice faithful presence.

Douglas Schuurman captures the need for these practices when he writes:

Christian formation must be more comprehensive, intentional, and sustained. In such challenging times, it is crucial to attract the brightest and best to become church pastors, educators, and administrators. The education of all members, but especially of youth and new converts, needs emphasis. churches must explore new forms of community, forms that exhibit integrity, compassion, and solidarity with those in need. churches must work harder to form their members into a way of life that faithfully reflects the gospel. An hour or so of worship on Sunday simply is not enough. The teachings of Christianity must be socially embodied in a community. One learns to play the violin by practicing under the guidance of an accomplished violinist; one learns what it is to be in the woodwind section of an orchestra by playing in that section. So too one learns to be a Christian by engaging in Christian practices, guided by the wisdom and example of more experienced believers. These practices include entering into the historic liturgies of the church, giving an account of Christian hope when demanded by those who are punishing Christians for doing what is right (1 Peter 3:15), listening attentively to the teachings of the faith, participating in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, prayer, singing, forgiveness and reconciliation, and engaging in actions of compassion and justice in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Most specifically, however, the goal of this project is to apply these practices to the pastoral care and congregational life of NLPC.

## OBSERVATIONS

This study began with an examination of cultural forces that devalue and oppose the formation of community. These forces are at work in the congregational life of the church in ways similar to the culture at large. Since we were made for community, we learn best in community. Therefore, for better or worse the local Christian communities of which we are

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), Location 2067, Kindle.

a part powerfully shape how we learn our way in life, our calling – evaluating life choices, grappling with identity, embracing vocation, and making sense of our place in the world. Since our understanding of calling – specifically, the practice of faithful presence – is integral to community, church leaders need to address these influences if they hope to reshape congregational culture.

### **Transience**

As in most university communities, Ithaca is a mixture of people who have come to this place to live and of people who have come to this place to prepare to live somewhere else. For the former, Ithaca is home; for the latter, a stop along the way. That mixture will remain an inevitable part of the ebb and flow of life in a small university town.

Transience exists as a consequence of mobility, the ability to move about with freedom. To be sure, the freedom to relocate is a privilege, but not inherently a virtue. For students who have the freedom and means to come to Ithaca to study and then to move elsewhere for the next chapter of their lives, mobility is a great blessing. Mobility implies the luxury of choice, the freedom and opportunity to select the path we will pursue. For those who lack freedom and opportunity, mobility can be an oppressive invitation to feel cheated and unfulfilled.

Many of the people who call Ithaca home feel the impact of being surrounded by lives that are just passing through, and they come to regard their home town as a highly fluid and unpredictable place to live. As a result they may find themselves reluctant to forge deep bonds and connections. Thus, transience represents both the blessing of opportunity and the curse of instability. Transience is one consequence of an established cultural reality,

globalization, which is an extraordinary opportunity for NLPC to reach the nations of the world.<sup>6</sup>

As a local congregation we can employ several strategies to flourish in a constantly changing environment. The first rises from pastoral rhetoric and general teaching. Do we have a theology of place?<sup>7</sup> As an outflow of what we affirm about the creation, do we create space for the tension that exists between the hold-on-and-stay of stewardship and the break-free-and-explore of creativity? Our goal is not to identify some mythical ideal along that continuum as the true and perfect response.<sup>8</sup> Rather, our goal is to keep both stewardship and creativity in view at all times so that one does not ignore or devalue the other.

If we as a community do not ask each other, “Why move?” we may end up either staying and feeling trapped or moving and feeling driven. In neither case will we have the confidence of God’s calling, which always includes life (work, too) in a place.

Our understanding of creation also informs our theology of place by affirming that God has made us for the world. The old revival chorus, “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’ through,” does little to help us linger and savor the goodness of what is beneath our feet or be quiet enough to be present in the lives of those whose company we keep.

Even when moving is a consequence of wisdom or necessity we can still encourage each other to ask: Are you moving solely based on the pragmatic benefits (promotion, pay raise,

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<sup>6</sup> "Our lives are increasingly formed — or kept permanently formless — within the swirling vortex of temporariness: temporary homes, jobs, vehicles, schools, mates. 'A vast landscape of the temporary has arisen, peopled with thousands of floating executives and countless numbers of part-time and temporary workers, all unable or unwilling to make long-term connections to their communities.... A system of great research universities also belongs to this universe, fostering transnational mobility and a disposition to think and live beyond America.'" William Leach, *A Country of Exiles* in Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who Are We? Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 40.

<sup>7</sup> See Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Figure 1, “A Matrix of Decision-Making.” This chart does not imply a possible “perfect” bulls-eye convergence of duty, desire, necessity, and opportunity. We know from experience and an earnest seeking of wisdom and God’s guidance that our choices (for fully legitimate reasons) plot from the furthest extremes of left, right, up, and down to everywhere in between.

opportunity), or are you moving into community; are you moving with a sense that you are carrying forward the mission of God; are you moving with the commitment to belong to the place that you will call home? Or, from another perspective we ask: Are you taking your present community with you; can the congregation “send” you to your new place of work and residence; do you view your move to a new location as a continuation of your call?

The NLPC “alumni” list now far outnumbers the list of folks currently in attendance, and we continue to include our extended family in regular congregational correspondence. Among our alumni are women and men who are now scattered to the four winds, blown from our presence by God’s providence. The time in Ithaca for many alumni was a

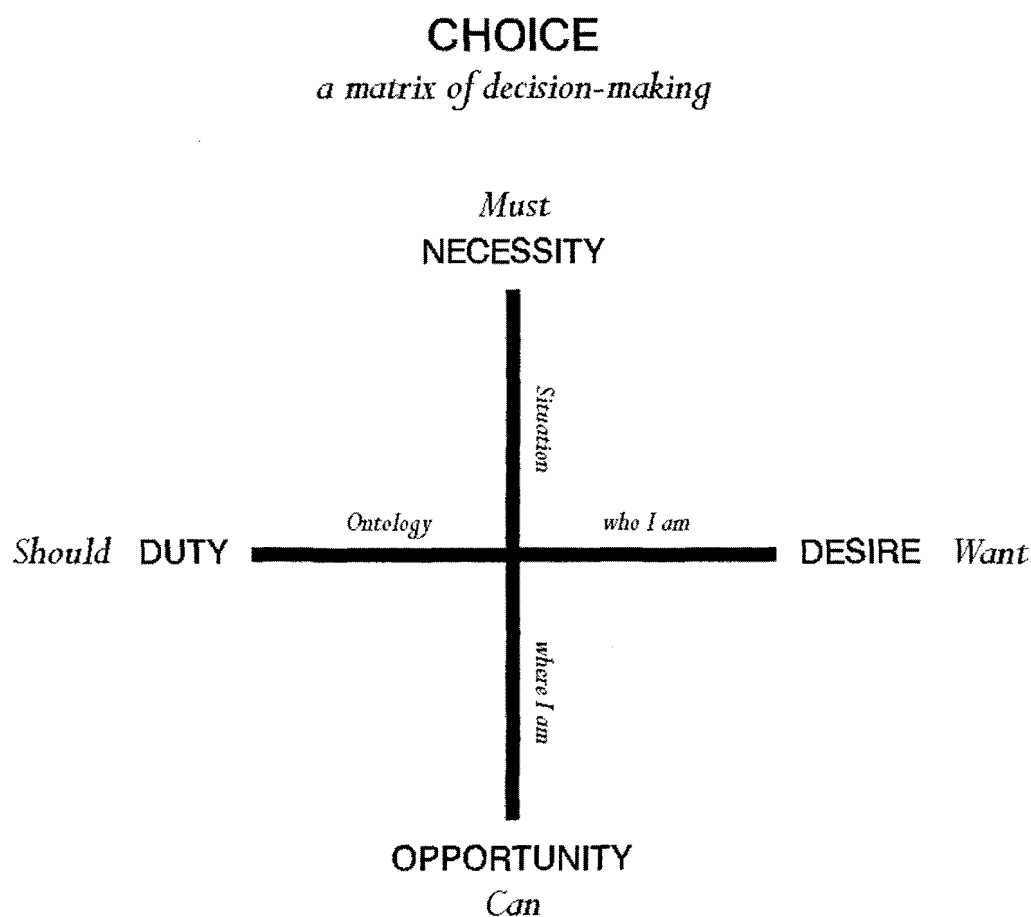


Figure 1



formative season of their lives. For newly married couples, NLPC was the first church that was theirs together. For couples starting a family, their first children were baptized at NLPC. For others, including those non-students who have moved away from Ithaca for jobs or life circumstances, they take with them NLPC's vision for being a community and seeking the welfare of the city. One indicator of this continuing connectedness is the growing number of our alumni who continue to support NLPC financially.

Another strategy addresses the detachment exposed by transience – a disconnection from history as well as from larger Christian community. Congregational worship needs to emphasize continuity with past, present, and future. God's people today need to be deeply connected to those who have gone before, to those globally who share our present moment in history, and with the future to which we will belong together forever. As much as possible, we want our sense of the “footprint” of the church to be as large as it really is. So, the music and words of our liturgy, even our attentiveness to the church calendar and the seasons of the Christian year, self-consciously express indebtedness to the rich heritage of Christian tradition. In our own moment, we look for ways to embody evangelical catholicity in our relationship with other local congregations, even looking for opportunities to gather with other congregations for fellowship and joint worship as well as to partner in service. We also intercede for those around the world who suffer on behalf of our common cause in Christ, and we think about how the character of our local life contributes to or detracts from the collective witness of the Christian “city set on a hill.”<sup>9</sup> All this is seasoned by a cultivated longing for that day when all the nations of the world, people from every tribe and tongue, will gather to Christ at the feast celebrating the *shalom* of the world made new.

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<sup>9</sup> “The first form of Christian witness before a watching world is the embodied love of Christ at work visibly in his church.” Darrell Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 42.

The effect of these efforts, hopefully, will add some weight to the way we think about our place and movement. The intent is for these strategies to encourage both wise movement and patient perseverance. Frankly, there is no way that we can “seek the welfare of the city” if in the back of our mind we are ready to dash off to the next new and better opportunity. Underlying this modest reluctance is a belief that situational opportunism and operational success are not sufficient reasons for Christians to justify a decision to stay or move. The practice of faithful presence requires us to be present in the place to which we have been called.

### Depersonalization

Not only are we a people too often restless, disconnected, and disquieted, but we are also a people with a distorted view of self. The answers to “What does it mean to be human?” and “What does it mean to love and be loved?” do not come easily in a world defined by mechanistic materialism, the raw and ruthless grind with no meaningful beginning or end. It’s what Bono calls “karma,” the religiously indifferent “eye for an eye” at the heart of the universe.<sup>10</sup> Alienation from God inevitably results in alienation from other humans and even the world itself. Identity grounded in the creature rather than the creator leads to a Nietzschean grasp for power more at home in the *Lord of the Flies* than in the garden of

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<sup>10</sup> "At the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics; in physical laws every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff." Bono, "Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas," Entry Posted September 27, 2010, <http://www.thepoachedegg.net/the-poached-egg/2010/09/bono-interview-grace-over-karma.html> (accessed April 12, 2014).

Eden. Consequently, dignity is often reduced to the defense of “my” political rights and the demand for “my” personal freedoms.

Dignity conferred has commonly been displaced by dignity earned, a self-justification that imposes a crushing burden on those who are unwilling to look outside themselves for significance and fulfillment. At least two issues accompany this self turned inward: loneliness and brokenness.

Being responsible for one’s own identity produces a profound loneliness, the self lost in alienation. The evidence suggests that busyness and digital social connectivity do little to alleviate the problem. Promiscuity and addictions are often desperate attempts to deny or resolve the problem. Some people shout more loudly in order to be heard and accepted, but decibels do not make other people listen or love. The actions of love, touch, and presence are deeply humanizing,<sup>11</sup> and without them life feels impersonal and detached, and we feel alone.<sup>12</sup>

The brokenness we experience in our own bodies and in our life experience often leads to a belief that we are incomplete and inadequate. Consequently, we strive to overcome and conquer, or we succumb to despair. Disease, divorce, and disappointment are all forms of brokenness that tend to eat away at our confidence, our dignity and sense of self-worth. Furthermore, postmodernism with its emphasis on fragmentation and alienation does little to encourage even the possibility of discovering the completeness and belonging for which the human spirit persistently longs.

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<sup>11</sup> “Our work in this world, if it is good work (although mixed with sin and deconstruction), is part of God’s intended mission of humanizing the earth, developing the potential of creation, enhancing life, and blessing the nations.” Stevens, *Doing God’s Business*, Location 3700.

<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the illusion of intimacy in consumer-driven sex: “The union reached in the brief moment of orgasmic climax leaves strangers as far apart as they were before so that they feel their estrangement even more markedly than before.” Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), 45.

Ithaca is a city of people who work hard, often with great sacrifice driven by ideas and ideals. It is a place burdened with an immense sense of duty to make the world better and right, to preserve the earth from destructive selfishness and greed, and to rescue people from disease, injustice, ignorance, and starvation. Whether they have their minds in the data and theories of the academy or their hands in the organic soil of the environment, many of those who shoulder this burden end up either bloated with pride or devastated by disappointment. Either way, self is lost.

The commodification of life is similarly depersonalizing. The artifacts of culture, as well as people, are reduced to objects of economic value – the worth of the elements of life is measured by their instrumental value, their ability to be exchanged or used for what we want. Decision-making (see figure 1) becomes driven by the belief that personal happiness is the greatest good or by the numbed belief that necessity forces our hand by reducing our choices to the inevitable.

As a local congregation we can respond in ways that personalize peoples' lives as we embody a relationship with the Triune God in Christ. Perhaps most fundamentally, we need to rethink what it means to love. While the actions of love are far more varied than what I will discuss here, love needs to be without strings.<sup>13</sup> That is, we need to learn to love our neighbors as men and women, boys and girls who bear God's image. Creational identity is the foundational beginning of love, and we must refuse to hold love hostage to less significant (and sometimes idolatrous) ways we distinguish one another. Would it not be more deeply personalizing to love someone as an honored image bearer rather than as someone who will offer us a favorable return on our investment? Mark's Gospel account of Jesus' conversation with the wealthy young man concludes with the hard words, "Go, sell all

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<sup>13</sup> "Love simply sees the neighbor and loves. And that is what makes a vocation holy." Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, Location 3887, Kindle.

your possessions.” However, Mark introduces the difficult command with this observation:

“Jesus looking at him, loved him.”<sup>14</sup>

On a much more cosmic scale, we must understand that God loves the world quite apart from our response to his love.<sup>15</sup> This priority of love needs to influence our attitudes toward evangelism. How much more fully is the gospel proclaimed when the words spoken are preceded by genuine love for and relationship with the person to whom we speak the good news regardless of that person’s response?<sup>16</sup> In cities like Ithaca, which celebrate homosexuality and frequently demand public approval of same-sex relationships, love must not be contingent on views or behavior, or time. Love must be committed patiently to accompanying our neighbors on the long journey toward faith.

Love that is creationally grounded is also practically situational. To love is to be present with those we love in the moment of our fellowship and communion. How much more present would we be with one another if we were to put cell phones out of sight during conversation? Being present with one another means that we must be intentional about two ways we express our love.

First, we need to make space to listen. Many of our friends within and without the church in Ithaca have deeply thoughtful and strongly held opinions about life issues. As a result there is regular disagreement on public issues within the congregation. We must be willing to listen in order to understand before we speak thereby creating an environment in which the person we love is safe and free to speak without interruption or correction. Our neighbors should fear no threat in disclosing their hearts both in the admission of brokenness and weakness as well as in stating disagreement and disapproval of Christ,

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<sup>14</sup> Mark 10:21.

<sup>15</sup> “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10).

<sup>16</sup> “The comprehensive character of incarnational evangelism is lost when the gospel we proclaim speaks only to the individual and his or her personal salvation.” Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 34.

Christians, and Christianity. At the same time, we learn together the limits and boundaries of pressing our opinions – as we live face to face, the people with whom we disagree are not a disembodied “they.”<sup>17</sup> Our first response to having listened in love is acknowledgement, recognition: I hear you; I know you better; I believe you. We may not agree, but we can say with affirming honesty: I understand you.

Second, and closely related to the first, we need to rethink how we respond once we have listened. Our responses must begin with an unspoken theological affirmation: only God has the wisdom and power truly to heal the brokenness in the life of the one I love. But as those who are in Christ, we respond in his name remembering that all the power and wisdom needed at every moment belong to him and are present in this place and moment. We also respond remembering that his grace to those he is loving is not detached from the agency of the members of his body. Our role in loving others is part of his redemptive methodology. Because we trust him and look to him for salvation, we respond to the brokenness and broken-heartedness of those we love not as fixers and healers, but as the presence of the one who alone can heal and give understanding. Of course, many other expressions of love will follow.

## **Confusion**

Jesus asked Nicodemus, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?”<sup>18</sup> Knowledge and information do not automatically translate into

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<sup>17</sup> In 2003 when the US invoked military action against Iraq, NLPC was divided about the wisdom and morality of that action. The elders (also divided) set the disagreement before the congregation charging them a) to hold informed views with conviction, charity, and humility; b) to leave the promotion of those views outside of congregational worship, and c) to recognize that if holding their opinion was an impediment to hospitality and worship with fellow believers, the opinion had become idolatrous thereby necessitating repentance.

<sup>18</sup> John 3:10.

understanding, belief, wisdom, and righteousness. In fact, it has been this way from the beginning when Satan sought to confuse our first parents, “Did God actually say?”<sup>19</sup> From the earliest days in the life of God’s people, Yahweh commanded that his words be read to the people.<sup>20</sup> The leaders were charged to proclaim and explain God’s word to the whole gathered community, and the community as a whole was to listen and commit themselves to belief and obedience.<sup>21</sup> So, too, the Apostles call God’s people to place themselves under the ordained Apostolic preaching and teaching of God’s word. Our response is to be the same as that of all the saints who have gone before us: belief and obedience.

So, church leadership has the responsibility to teach God’s people about what it means to live faithfully for God as his people in the world. However, many congregations have been negligent or indifferent to biblical instruction on calling and community. Church leaders, as William Diehl has noted, are teaching (at least by implication) a functional Gnosticism, a dualism that makes little serious connection between worship and work and between love for God and love for the world. We have largely failed to teach God’s people to be united as one body in their labor and to understand the relationship of work, calling, and vocation to the *mission Dei*.<sup>22</sup>

But confusion results not only from failure at the top. The postmodern view of the world prioritizes authenticity over truth. Belief, then, becomes centered in self, not constructed from above. Not surprisingly, genuine Christians rarely admit they are reluctant to place themselves under any authority other than their own private judgment. Most of us

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<sup>19</sup> Gen 3:1.

<sup>20</sup> Deut 31:11.

<sup>21</sup> Exod 24:7.

<sup>22</sup> I will comment on this text again, but when Paul says that “each one should remain in the condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:20) he is keeping creation and Redemption together. His argument for discouraging separation in a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is that the unbelieving spouse “is made holy” by the presence of the believing spouse (1 Cor 7:14). Faithful presence is participation in God’s work of redemption. Redemption is at work in marriage, and so, too, in every other area of vocation and calling.

would be offended at any suggestion that we do not believe that “Jesus is Lord.”<sup>23</sup> But the hubris of our age has soaked into our way of thinking. We shop for pastors and teachers who meet our approval and teach us what we prefer to believe. We approach the Bible with the expectation that we will believe only what we understand and with the confidence that we can resolve Scriptural controversies to our own satisfaction. Many Christians do not regard membership in the church<sup>24</sup> as important, nor do they regard it as integral to biblical understanding. Individual Christians commonly say in response to biblical teaching, particularly on difficult subjects, “I hear what you are saying, and I understand it, but I don’t see it that way and don’t believe I need to do what you think I should do. I’m content to be accountable only to God for my actions and beliefs.” But this sort of independence overlooks the longstanding call of God throughout history for his people to place themselves under the leadership he has ordained.<sup>25</sup> The church is integral to how we understand and obey God’s word.

Understandably, the postmodern mind is wary of human claims of authority, particularly in the name of God. In Ithaca there are at least two ways that our neighbors respond to the notion of authority or truth. One is capitulation to reason, to “accepted” fact. This is true in the academy and more widely in secular society by presuming that in a closed mechanistic universe human reason has the capacity to discover all we need to know and to confirm those foundational facts to which we must, then, (logically) submit our lives and thinking. These conclusions become like a theological primer, a statement of authoritative beliefs about what is true.

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor 12:3.

<sup>24</sup> This is not a commentary on formal membership in a local congregation, but refers to an intentional accountability to a local congregation that may or may not include formal membership.

<sup>25</sup> “Respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thess 5:12-13).



Another response begins with the claim that reason is inherently and inescapably adversarial to “faith” (implying that faith is unreasonable or irrational and inevitably oppressive). At the same time, many of those who are convinced rationalists, not recognizing that they are in fact submitting to an authoritative set of beliefs, vigorously reject the notion of truth. They are convinced that making truth claims is imperialistic abuse of power. They believe that one person does not have the right to tell another person what is true or right. This epistemological libertarianism, while emboldening the stubbornness of private opinion, does not promote a deep cultural certainty about the trustworthiness of what we believe.

The Christian community, therefore, must give thought not only to the content of the church’s teaching, but also to the means by which we teach that content. The old plausibility structures that gave Christianity public credibility have crumbled. Christians need to be equipped to hold Christian truth within the larger world of thought in which we live and to engage sympathetically with the profound uncertainty of the culture. There is nothing new or distinctive about that apologetic mission or the ongoing need for explaining how we as Christians and as humans arrive at truth. But the context is far different from what it was even a generation ago.

At the same time, pastors and teachers must help Christians repent of their rationalistic over-confidence (that we often share with the culture) and cultivate a trustworthy environment in which followers of Christ can recognize and value the ordained shepherding role of ecclesiastical leadership. In this endeavor the historic creeds and confession of the church play an important role establishing a catholicity of doctrine. Personal belief and obedience are never to be undermined or displaced, but church leaders need to emphasize

more persistently the necessary connection between individual beliefs and the ecclesiastical affirmations of the church.<sup>26</sup>

Critical to this study is the importance of teaching God's people that having been called to God, we have been called to one another so that together we may love the world. Together we face the challenge of rethinking what it means to do God's will, not as a thousand points of light, but as a constellation. Together we must learn the biblical wisdom of practicing faithful presence.

### **Individualism**

Sociologists like Bellah, Wuthnow, Bauman, and Lasch (to name a few) all identify individualism as a dominant influence in the way we understand and order our lives today. The drift away from institutional and collective identity is obvious in the decline in church membership accompanied by the rise in private spirituality. In the American socio-political experiment of which we have been a part for over two hundred years, we have learned to value autonomy as the means to success and abundance. From our reluctance to use public transportation to our invention of single serve coffees, we are a Burger King nation. But "have it your way" is a long way from *e pluribus unum*. Our championing of individualism has been at the expense of structures that shape and sustain our culture. Law, religion, ethics, and art now seem to be vehicles for self-expression more than means by which the community is strengthened and unified.

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<sup>26</sup> It's worth noting, I believe, that there is no evidence that the Roman Catholic Magisterium has done a better job of overcoming this confidence in private judgment than have Protestants – the problem resides in our humanness, not in our ecclesiastical structures.

In this regard the church frequently behaves just like the general culture. Many Christians think of themselves as *individual* believers long before they think of themselves as *members* of the body of Christ. Too frequently we think of gifts of the Spirit as personal enabling instead of resources for stewardship and self-less service. Reconciliation with God is commonly reduced to a personal encounter with Jesus. Do we as Christians think of the church primarily in terms of our local congregations or as an immense historic and global family?

I believe many Christians in Ithaca feel marginalized because of their identification with the church and with Christ. Consequently, it is easy to feel like one against the world. However, when the critics of Christianity attempt to discredit the institution of which we are a part, it is not uncommon for Christians in Ithaca to cling to this identity that is bigger than themselves. When our neighbors are dismissive of God and the church, some Christians feel isolated and alone. Yet remarkably, living in a post-Christian city has encouraged many Christians to live *into* the larger Christian community. The Evangelical pastors of Ithaca experience this unity as well and have forged a remarkable bond of ministerial and personal affection and respect. As pastors of the church in Ithaca we recognize our responsibility to encourage a proper confidence within the family of God so that secular cynicism does not so easily dismember us. But I suspect that this blessing of unity among Christians in Ithaca is not an experience familiar to most Christians in America.

When we define our lives in terms of self-interest, self-fulfillment, and self-preservation we pave the way for a refined kind of idolatry. Choices become framed in terms of what makes us happy or what capitalizes on the most effective use of our abilities so that we realize the full potential of who we are as individual human beings (see Figure 1).

How can local congregations do a better job of saying “we” instead of “I”? We need to think about the ways we gather ourselves as a community. For instance, while age-

appropriate education is wise and probably necessary, if we extend that age segregation too aggressively we will not experience the enrichment of trans-generational relationships. How are our children benefitting from friendships with seasoned saints, and vice versus. Consider too the extraordinarily important role of singles in the life of the church family. How are they affirmed but not exploited? How are they honored and not over-looked? How can they be better served by the non-single part of the congregation, and vice versus? There is certainly a place for men to be with men and women with women. At the same time, how are we cultivating masculine and feminine virtues in the context of male-female relationships? How can we nurture a community that resists the impulse of the many cultural and social markers that divide us into rich and poor, cultured and common, educated and illiterate, mature and immature, athletic and clumsy, imaginative and mundane, visionary and practical, Democrat and Republican? We cannot insist on protecting our individualized identities if we hope to serve one another through the grace of faithful presence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This project has lived at the intersection of the church and work. More specifically, the local congregation and calling. The focus of this project is a rather narrow pedagogical question that does not attempt to address all the issues related to community and calling. The goal is to explore how the local congregation can recover an understanding and practice of community in order not just to *be* a community, but to function as a formative disciple-making community that shapes and influences how Christians live in the world in response to the call of God, in the pursuit of their vocations and work, and in the exercise of faithful presence.

## Vision

Community, the way we turn toward one another as neighbors and as brothers and sisters in Christ, requires us to be intentional. “Community is no longer something we are born into. It is now something we must choose.”<sup>27</sup> The vision of a local congregation articulates those intentions so that the choices can be evaluated by the goals and priorities affirmed by that vision. A vision statement is like a map that traces our origin in God to our mission in the world. It affirms who he is so that we can order our lives as a community devoted to his purpose. Vision articulates our hope, and “we will work in the same direction we hope.”<sup>28</sup>

Like the exiled community in Babylon we ask, “What does it mean to seek the welfare of the city?”<sup>29</sup> Not just any city. Our city. Ithaca, NY. How can we employ the gifts of the Spirit entrusted to us for the common good?<sup>30</sup> What does it mean for us to live as a city on a hill<sup>31</sup> in such a way that our life as a community summons the larger city of which we are a part to worship and follow Christ? What does it mean for us as followers of Christ to live righteously so that the city rejoices?<sup>32</sup> Our city. How can we live in such a way that Ithaca will flourish and experience the goodness of God’s kingdom brought near?

To have a gospel vision for our city, we must love our city and know our city. We must be convinced that our city matters to God.<sup>33</sup> The welfare of our neighbors must matter to us

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and the Quest for a New Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), Location 65, Kindle.

<sup>28</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Location 42, Kindle.

<sup>29</sup> Jer 29:7.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Cor 12:7.

<sup>31</sup> Matt 5:14.

<sup>32</sup> Prov 11:10.

<sup>33</sup> Four times in the book of Jonah, Yahweh refers to Ninevah as that “great city” (Jonah 1:2; 3:2, 3; 4:11). He sends Jonah to the city because as the repeated emphasis makes clear, the city is important to God.

because they are friends who bear God's image. What can we bring to Ithaca that enriches it, helps it flourish, completes what is lacking, and brings healing to what is broken? Central to the answer to those questions is reconciliation to God in Christ. But in seeking the welfare of the city we must think carefully and strategically about how to give voice and presence to the message of reconciliation.

In 2012 when NLPC was forced to find a new venue for Sunday services, we took the occasion to revise our vision statement. The church leadership wanted to use the transition of location to remind the congregation of the missional priorities informing our decision-making. The new vision statement following the triune character of God affirms that we are

*Celebrating New Life in Christ and Renewed Hope for the City*

God's grace gives us a love for our city and a longing to promote its flourishing in every way. Jesus Christ is the heart and soul of our life together. As a worshipping community we have confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ to bring about personal transformation, restored community, social justice, and cultural renewal in Ithaca and throughout the world. Because of what Jesus has accomplished, God's Spirit gives us new life and the courage to live with joy, mercy, and hope.

Our missional priorities affirmed in this statement informed two important decisions related to our relocation. First, because of our commitment to serving the city, we wanted to remain in the downtown area. Second, because the economy of the city continues to struggle, we wanted our presence downtown to add stability to businesses that shared our commitment to the city. As a result, we now lease space each Sunday from a downtown arts theater, and our shared use of this space gives valued income to the theater and helps ensure that the theater is an attractive draw for downtown business.

Because we are a congregation of limited resources, we look for opportunities to support existing efforts to promote the welfare of the city. But even if we had abundant resources, I am not convinced that inventing an NLPC-version of existing ministries and services would be consistent with our vision or the mission of God. We focus our congregational

contribution of service and resources on three opportunities that we regard as strategic and important to the needs of our city: The Ithaca Pregnancy Center, Chesterton House Center for Christian Studies at Cornell,<sup>34</sup> and The Community Faith Partners.<sup>35</sup> Our involvement with these organizations is *intentional* and by design gives the congregation opportunities for gospel witness and kingdom service in ways that meet the needs of the city and engage us with our neighbors.

Our vision keeps in mind *impromptu* involvement as well. That is, we hope that the members of the congregation will think creatively about ways to seek the welfare of the city and bring joy and grace to our neighbors. When they have ideas, we want to guide and support their imagination, helping to bring their ideas to reality and helping to connect their creativity with the missional momentum already present in the local Christian community.

Also, our vision affirms work and vocation as *integral* to gospel mission and our congregational identity. God's people serve our city and steward creation in every area of culture, in every segment of life in our city, and we want to encourage them to speak and live faithfully in the cause of the gospel. There is no higher priority in the life of the church than the support of God's people in their calling to engage fully in every area of life for the glory of God, for the common good, and with the hope of the world made new.

We revised our membership vows at the same time as the vision statement. As our vision statement creates a unifying framework for community formation, our membership vows confirm our participation in God's work in the world, his unified narrative of creation,

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<sup>34</sup> "Chesterton House exists to facilitate the discovery of the intellectual riches of the historic Christian faith" among students and faculty at Cornell University. <http://www.chestertonhouse.org> (accessed June 17, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> The Community Faith Partners is committed to "uniting Christians to improve the welfare of our neighbors through: relationships across organizational, racial and economic barriers; discovery of personal vocation through spiritual growth; and service which demonstrates God's care for every individual." <http://www.communityfaithpartners.org> (accessed June 17, 2013).

Fall, redemption, and consummation. Now, when folks join NLPC, these are the vows they take:

Do you believe that, according to the Scriptures, God made the world good, made men and women in his image and for communion with himself – all for his glory?

Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, part of the sinful rebellion that spoiled the goodness and *shalom* of God's world, justly deserving his judgment and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?

Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

Affirming the coming of God's kingdom and anticipating the *shalom* of the heaven and earth made new, do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

### **Instruction**

Teaching and preaching provide the foundational context for what God's people hold to be true and how followers of Christ work out what it means to practice faithful presence in every area of life. Therefore, sermons and lessons need to keep the local vision as well as the mission of God regularly before the congregation through both instruction and application.

Critical to community formation is a purposeful resistance to the cultural pressure of individualism and detachment. But the instructional emphasis must not skew the biblical perspective. The self, the individual is not obliterated in the biblical notion of community. Rather, individual responsibility is exercised alongside accountability to the community. Maintaining this tension requires ongoing pastoral guidance.



Essential to individual responsibility is obedience and stewardship. More than mere duty, obedience is love in action as we respond to that part of God's call, which is most clear in the imperatives of scripture. We exercise stewardship when we recognize the gifts of God entrusted personally to us: "To each [one] is given the manifestation of the Spirit."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, pastoral instruction must encourage individual Christians keep these profoundly personal choices deeply rooted in the context of community, pursuing the common good and making the body whole.

Sermons and teaching strongly influence individuals' understanding of identity. Proclamation begins with the gospel and the new identification we have "in Christ." This grand covenant reality unites us to Christ and hides us in him forever. But at the same time, we were created to be known by name, as men and women who are distinct and distinctly valued by the Creator.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, instruction must wrestle with personal questions of identity and significance ("Who am I?"), often very closely tied to our understanding of calling ("Why am I here?"). Earnest Christians want to know how their lives will please God especially in those areas of life for which Scripture provides no explicit instruction: what job to take, whom to marry, whether to marry, which college to attend, what church to join. Pastoral guidance needs to inform Christians how to view these personal choices in the context of the mission of God and the practice of faithful presence.

Understanding how God is completing creation in Christ and understanding his promise to make the world new, enables Christians to be present in the world as we await the consummation of Christ's finished work. Consequently, a critical role of instruction is

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<sup>36</sup> 1 Cor 12:7.

<sup>37</sup> "Thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (Isa 43:1). Rev 2:17 anticipates the completion of the distinct individual identities of God's people. The unique name given to each of us will celebrate the fulfillment of our personhood.

imparting this great meta-narrative of history so that our present situation in life and culture in which we find ourselves fits into a much larger story. With this perspective we can work and love with freedom and hope, obedience and imagination, in that time and place in which God has set us.

Instruction needs to illuminate calling within the biblical record, especially non-ecclesiastical vocations. The New Testament gives us hints of vocations in the life of the church, but little elaboration. We see mention of people working in medicine, the military, manufacturing, retail, and government; and we read about employers and employees. But in the Old Testament many of the prominent instances of vocation are of men and women in exile, in great cities of influence, and in deeply secular or pagan environments: Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther. Even David and Solomon give us a window into life in government, economics, and law. These biographies offer us tremendous insight into a practical understanding of faithful presence, and should figure prominently in our teaching about calling and the mission of God.

Additionally, the Apostolic emphasis on work and vocation does not encourage Christians to think that loyalty to Christ requires them to uproot and embark on a missionary journey. Rather Paul directs Christians to be reluctant to change their life situations, and he encourages us to continue in our current work with diligence and faithfulness.<sup>38</sup> We continue where we are because calling is already at work in the present through the presence of Christ's Spirit – no change of situation in our lives is required for us to participate in the *mission Dei*.

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<sup>38</sup> "Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called" (1 Cor 7:20). Paul is not prohibiting any change of life situation (marriage, employment, residence). Rather he means (excepting illegitimate professions) that we should move toward maturity in the Christian life with the assumption that we will continue in the world as we were before we began new life in Christ. Paul advocates continuing to work quietly, faithfully, in earning a living and pursuing a vocation (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12) as the norm for how Christians live out their faith in the world.

Everything we know and do hangs upon the gospel, what Christ has accomplished in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. With that foundation, we carefully work out a theology of creation, of work, of rest, of calling, of mission, and of hope. Thus we pray as Jesus taught us: “May people everywhere worship you; may your *shalom* cover the earth; may everyone delight to do what God has called us to do.”<sup>39</sup> However, the terrain of calling and vocation is so vast that the connections between gospel and mission, faith and work, require creative and persistent affirmation and elaboration through instruction. We will take into our work an informed knowledge of the kingdom of God. As we live into our vocations enacting faithful presence, each of us needs to know internally that the beauty, truth, justice, order, and goodness that is the stuff of our work is in fact the beauty, truth, justice, order, and goodness of God. These are the biblical and missional themes that regularly inform the teaching and preaching at NLPC.

## **Worship**

In the life of the church nothing influences community formation more than congregational worship, the liturgical and sacred actions that bind us together before the face of God. But if the practice of faithful presence is a priority and if community has a formative benefit, then the liturgy must reinforce the connection between community and calling. The principle of faithful presence requires more than accurate biblical information about calling and being schooled in the doctrines of creation and vocation; it also depends upon a way of seeing, a cultivated awareness of our lives lived in the presence of the other, a shared perspective nurtured by acts of worship.

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<sup>39</sup> Matt 6:9-10.

## Engagement

Congregational worship must engage as widely as possible everyone who gathers for worship. If worship is truly to be the worship of God's people, then God's people must be the ones who participate diversely and visibly in enacting the reality that this is *our* worship. Congregational worship may be carefully ordered and led with great effect, but regardless of the form, the purpose of worship will be significantly obscured and possibly diminished when congregants are reduced merely to being spectators.

Liturgy leads to the engagement of the whole person, both body and soul. Posture and gesture, song and spoken word, noise and silence, focus and presence are all aspects of embodied worship when these actions flow from our hearts. Thus David affirms the goal of worship when he prays: "Unite my heart"<sup>40</sup> or "Give me an undivided heart" (NIV). He prays that all the expressions and actions of worship will come from heart that is whole. When our cognition or understanding, our affection or desire, and our volition or will are one, then our whole person is united in worship.<sup>41</sup> Oh, that our lives in God's presence would be void of conflicted contradiction, that what we understand is what we do is what we love.

At NLPC we strive for a high level of congregational engagement in worship. From setup and greeting, to reading, praying, singing, and serving, we work hard at giving people a wide range of opportunities to participate (taking into consideration gifts and maturity as appropriate). The structure of our liturgy gives guidance to the participants and provides (with pastoral encouragement and direction) a clear context for that participation. In particular, children, singles, and women (three groups often marginalized in congregational

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<sup>40</sup> Ps 86:11.

<sup>41</sup> This idea comes from a recorded but unpublished talk by Tim Keller (April 1997).

worship) are affirmed as full participants in our worship. The praises and petitions offered by the congregation in NLPC worship share the stories of our lives and thereby strengthen our understanding of and commitment to one another.

Similarly, the liturgy at NLPC has in mind the engagement of the whole person by allowing space for physical responses like clapping and the raising of hands. The pacing and imagery of the elements of worship keep in view the affective movement of the theme that unifies the service. The content of congregational worship attends to understanding and commitment. Times of silence allow for active reflection, and the sensory appeal of the Eucharistic elements (the fresh-baked artisan bread and a New York red wine with strong tannins) factors meaningfully into a worship offered by the whole person.

The engagement of the whole fellowship and the whole person, informed by faithful presence, suggests several implications.

### *Size*

How large can a congregation be and still maintain the ability to function as a community especially with all the dynamics of engagement? Once the congregation reaches an attendance of two hundred, in my experience, the capacity for engagement tends to diminish precipitously. At this point the trade off is between resources gained by the larger size and community maintained by the smaller size. I do not mean this as an absolute demarcation, but as a general tipping point with tendencies on either side. Because I value engagement so highly, I am inclined to think that the better solution, given the mission of the church, would be to divide into two congregations when size begins to restrict engagement and community formation.

## *Wonder, Laughter, and Sorrow*

The increased size of a congregation can easily suppress the freedom to engage in affective expressions that seem vital to community formation. Thomas Chalmers described “the expulsive power of a new affection.”<sup>42</sup> That is, godly affections that are healing and which focus on righteousness have the power to drive out those affections which are deadly and destructive. Therefore, our lives are more deeply united when we engage with one another in worship through these affections: expressing wonder at what we cannot fully comprehend, experiencing delight in God’s goodness and humor at ourselves, and facing sorrow in the inexplicable and unfixable brokenness of life as we know it. Together we learn how to live with what we do not understand (in spite of what we know), with all that is worthy of joy, and with all that breaks our hearts. To be so present in each other’s lives forms the strong bonds of community.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, worship needs to have a dialogical, not just a presentational character that creates space for God’s people to bring the affections of their hearts before the face of God so that together we may wonder, laugh, and weep.

## *Disagreement*

Although people everywhere have strong opinions, the academic flavor of our local opinions adds to the challenge to community formation. Many people in Ithaca think globally, and many people think of their global opinions as solutions to world-wide

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Chalmers, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,” <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Chalmers%20Thomas%20-%20The%20Expulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20New%20Af.pdf> (accessed April 27, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> “All day, every day, there are both wounds and wonders at the very heart of life, if we have eyes to see. And seeing...is where vocation beings. Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2014) 35.

problems. Then, there are the more in-house opinions related to theology and biblical interpretation. What do we as a church family do with differences of opinion, often on complex and important issues that genuinely relate to our core beliefs and public witness as Christians? We might ignore the controversy. We might also suppress it. But, neither of those options moves God's people toward maturity.

A better solution is what Darrell Guder calls “the witness of Christian disagreement.”<sup>44</sup> I noted previously the strong division of opinion within the NLPC congregation concerning American military action in Iraq in 2003. Disciple-making must include learning how to live with our differences as well as those real and profound questions which often have elusive and incomplete answers. While some differences may be irreconcilable thereby making community impossible, many differences do not need to prove divisive. The tension that contributes to missional community formation requires a persistent identification and gracious commitment to core beliefs – the gospel, those catholic doctrines affirmed in The Apostles Creed. Also, respect needs to be maintained for those commitments that distinguish NLPC as a Presbyterian and Reformed congregation – we hold a particular view of the sacraments and church government that are open for discussion but are not up for debate. But, those exceptions leave ample room for a whole host of disagreements – home schooling, legalization of same-sex marriage, military involvement in Ukraine, women serving as deacons, Yankees versus the Red Sox, a-millennialism versus pre-millennialism. Pastoral leadership needs to insist that these are disagreements about which we can be open and over which we will not be divisive (even though we will hold informed opinions with strong conviction). Leadership also needs to make clear that there is usually no compelling reason for NLPC as a local congregation to have an official opinion about many of these

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<sup>44</sup> Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 165ff.

disagreements. Rather the disagreements are an important part of our engagement with one another as we cultivate skills critical to community formation: listening, study, patience, humility, honor, loyalty. Worship, then, gathers us together so that the context for our disagreements is ultimately God's grace to us as rebels and sinners, as well as our mission and our shared commitment to make visible the kingdom of God.

## Prayer

Congregational prayer joins the person, presence, and purpose of God to the particulars of our lives – our relationships, our situations, and our work. In congregational worship we pray together in each other's presence. Prayer is a liturgical and organic fusion of trust in God's word and character, gratitude for and dependence on God's grace, honesty about the sinful brokenness that we experience and to which we contribute, and a hope in the completion of God's promises.

### *Prayer in Community*

Prayer in congregational worship takes many forms. Sometimes we sing our prayers, while other times we are silent. Public prayers may be prepared or extemporaneous. They can be led (requiring us to listen) or responsive (requiring us to read). Yet regardless of form, prayer is the disclosure of our lives in response to God's disclosure of himself.

Our prayers offered to God ought to address the whole triune being of God – Father, Son, and Spirit. We pray as a human community to a divine community which in turn refines and reforms our community. Therefore, if calling and mission are ultimately grounded in the



triune society of God, then it is essential that congregational worship be a dialogue between communities with our shared life mirroring the trinitarian life of the One we worship. If the practice of faithful presence begins with the recognition of the presence of God in every area and at every moment of life, then we confess that the One who is always with us is always Father, Son, and Spirit. Our praying together is critical to our living with the confidence that the Spirit's mediation, the Son's intercession, and the Father's providence are always at work and are always with us.<sup>45</sup> At NLPC we want public prayers to address the whole triune being of God and to acknowledge the works of each divine person.

Because prayer *in* community is also the prayers *of* the community, congregational praying should in some way reflect the wideness of God's gracious invitation for all to come boldly into his presence. What does this look like? At NLPC we devote a significant portion of weekly congregational worship to prayer. Men and women, boys and girls are encouraged to voice their praises and petitions to the Lord and in each other's presence. The praises and petitions that have been shared are included in a weekly prayer list given to the congregation. Men and women who are spiritually mature and appropriately gifted lead the congregation in bringing these praises and petitions before the face God both modeling how prayer rises from our knowledge of and faith in God as well as articulating how the events of our lives and desires of our hearts are connected to the mission of God that unites us as a community.

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<sup>45</sup> "God does not stand outside of nature and is not excluded from it by a hedge of laws, but is present in it and sustains it by the word of his power." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 370, in Richard Mouw, *The Challenge of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2012), 17.

Prayer unites us in common confession so that we are of one voice before God – it is with one voice that we respond, “Amen.” Furthermore, the content of our prayers to God reveals our lives to one another, a disclosure that requires trust. Learning to be safe in each other’s presence begins by learning to be safe in God’s presence as we settle deeply into an experiential and visceral understanding of the gospel.

However, prayer as intercession is much more than an expression of empathy. To be sure, it is deeply empathic, and rightly so, because we are present with one another in the situation that has provoked our praying. Thus, intercession is interactive. God is here, but so are we as those who are praying. In a profound sense (as we understand the implications of faithful presence), if we are present, so is God. Furthermore, where God is present, he is also at work advancing his mission. So, our intercession for one another in the very specific and personal details and situations of life ultimately is an act of entrusting each other to the mission and purpose of God. We speak the words “thy will be done” on behalf of one another. This means that, if in our intercessory prayers we ask God to provide strength for endurance for a brother or sister, we are declaring a willingness to be God’s provision of that encouragement.<sup>46</sup> Or, if we pray for resources, we are offering our resources to God as the possible means of his provision and the answer to our prayer. By praying with this perspective we are learning to view our shared concerns in the context of God’s mission. This participation means that we practice the discipline of entrusting our desires (“not my will”) to his purpose in creation and redemption. I may cry out to God for healing, which is

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<sup>46</sup> “To be present to another, to be a true friend, means to be forever on call, forever open, forever willing to be involved in the friend’s troubles.” Douglas V. Steere, *On Being Present Where You Are* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1967), 9, in Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 189.

a good and right thing to do. Yet, I learn to see myself and my need differently when a sister or brother prays that that my need be resolved in a way that reveals God's character, unites his people, and furthers his mission.

Intercession also helps us learn how to pray with wisdom. James reminds us that it is easy to petition God with sinful or misguided motives.<sup>47</sup> Public intercession is a valuable help as we wrestle with discernment in laying our requests and desires before the Lord. If nothing else, we learn that petitions should always be accompanied by praise and thanks for who God is, what he has already accomplished, and what he has promised to do. When someone else prays on my behalf with maturity and vision, my need and situation almost always get reframed and resituated within the character and purpose of the One who loves me most. When we receive other's intercession, we learn to see our needs in the light of God's mission.

### *Prayer as Affirmation*

Faith-filled Christians live with the hope that the labors of this life will be crowned with the best of blessings, the commendation spoken by Christ himself, "Well done" (Matthew 25:21). However, when we understand the implications of faithful presence, we recognize that eating and drinking to the glory of God<sup>48</sup> are possible only because God is present and at work even in the mundane things of life like our eating and drinking. It is because God is at work in all things we are able to say in response to his grace expressed through nature and people (Christians and non-Christians alike), "thank you" and "thanks be to God." Our double thanksgiving is prayerful gratitude expressed to God accompanied by gratitude to

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<sup>47</sup> Jas 4:2-3.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Cor 10:31.

those who have been his agents. A grateful spirit humbles us with the reminder that God's work in our relationships makes us dependent<sup>49</sup> (as Paul illustrates with the physical body, the eye needs the hand in 1 Corinthians 12:21). If we are to be loved, he will normally bring someone into our life to express that love.

When we say to one another, "Good job! Well done!" what do we mean? As with gratitude there is double acknowledgement and affirmation in view. The person we commend has done something, and at the same time God has done something. Since our commendation is an assessment, an evaluation of a work that has been accomplished, how exactly are we to measure that accomplishment? Upon what basis may we offer a commendation? In most cases the jobs we perform provide satisfaction when we believe that we have completed the task and that we have completed the task well. While that kind of satisfaction may be possible for smaller tasks like balancing the checkbook or closing a sale, we rarely feel like the larger life tasks of relationships and careers are ever really done. Life is uncontrollably complex, and we often feel tremendous uncertainty about whether our contribution to the task has made a difference.<sup>50</sup> Oh, to be able to say as Jesus does at the end of his earthly life, "I have finished the work that you gave me to do."<sup>51</sup> As he says from the cross, "It is finished."<sup>52</sup> I doubt that any person can conclude life with the level of certainty Jesus possessed. Consequently, we live our lives knowing that most of what we begin, we will leave unfinished, and most of the things we finish we will leave incomplete.

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<sup>49</sup> When Paul instructs the Thessalonians to "be dependent on no one" (1 Thess 4:12), he is not contradicting what he says to the Corinthians about the function of gifts in community. He is not advocating autonomous self-reliance. He is, however, emphasizing personal responsibility so that the community is not burdened by our irresponsibility or laziness.

<sup>50</sup> "John Calvin believed that an unredeemed life keeps oscillating back and forth between pride ("I've made it!") and despair ("I'll never make it!"). In his view, redemption gives people security, or...*repose*. His idea was that those who lean into God's grace and let it hold them up can then drop some of their performance anxiety." Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 118-19.

<sup>51</sup> John 17:4.

<sup>52</sup> John 19:30.

Plus, the whole process of work scars us with the effects of the Fall and leaves us, often, bruised and worn out. Thus, life commonly invites frustration and the inescapable sense of incompleteness that leads many to despair.

If we are to escape either of the extremes – hubris (the proud over-estimation of what we have accomplished) or futility (the weary doubt that we have accomplished anything) – we need a different measure of evaluation other than our own self-approval or feelings of satisfaction.<sup>53</sup> When we believe the gospel, we know that our work truly has great value, but not because the outcome of our work meets ours or anyone else's expectations. All that we do has value for two reasons. First, when our work is done out of love (for God and neighbor), it is worth doing. It is far more important to be confident of the integral goodness of work than it is to witness the instrumental goodness of what we accomplish. Before I conclude that my life has been worthless because I am convinced that the chairs I made did not change the world, I need to be confident that chairs are a good thing to make and (at the same time) that the chairs I made are good furniture. Second, God is faithfully at work when we work, even when I make chairs. Even at our worst (or so we think) nothing is wasted in his economy,<sup>54</sup> and all we do is a participation in his redemptive work of completing creation in Christ. It is far easier for us to believe that our work matters when the visible outcome of our labor meets our expectations. But it can be far more difficult to believe our work matters if we look only to ourselves for validation. "We need to live in community with others in order to see that the hand of God is not simply a figment of our imaginations."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Change "is not perceptible as an event or set of events currently unfolding. Rather, cultural change... can only be seen and described in retrospect, after the transformation has been incorporated into a new configuration of moral controls." Hunter, *To Change the World; The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 45.

<sup>54</sup> "All things must work together for my salvation" (*Heidelberg Catechism's* exposition of Rom 8:28 in Lord's Day 1), *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1988), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey*, 38.

How does all this relate to prayer? When we pray in public worship, we give thanks to God first for all things. But that prayer of thanksgiving remains incomplete when unaccompanied by a prayer of affirmation or blessing. Our prayers should acknowledge and give thanks for both the source and the means. We are declaring faithful presence by affirming that redemption is at work in creation. Whether or not you see it or believe it, God is always at work when you work (even the work of rest).<sup>56</sup> When I offer a public prayer of blessing for you, I declare that I have been the recipient of God's grace because of you. I say, in anticipation of and in participation with Christ's blessing, "Well done." Thus the community is strengthened through gratitude and a respect for God's humor and imagination in using whatever means pleases him (even his enemies) to accomplish his purpose.

As human beings and image bearers we have been created to make things and be productive – "fill the earth, exercise dominion." But even from the beginning productivity, creativity, and fruitfulness have all been the *consequence* of our identity, not the *source* of our identity. How then do we reconcile the command to be productive with the impulse to value our lives by measuring our productivity? We need to learn to live with the deep and settled confidence that the outcome of the mission of God falls squarely and solely upon the back of Christ. He is the one who promises "I am making all things new."<sup>57</sup> He is the one who is the beginning and the end.<sup>58</sup> He is the one by whom all things exist<sup>59</sup> and are held together.<sup>60</sup> He is the great reconciler of all things to God.<sup>61</sup> Our work, then, is a

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<sup>56</sup> God's work is never dependent on our work even though he often uses us and blesses our work. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms in the chapter on providence, God works with us, against us, and in spite of us (V.iii).

<sup>57</sup> Rev 21:5.

<sup>58</sup> Rev 21:6.

<sup>59</sup> Heb 2:10.

<sup>60</sup> Col 1:17.

<sup>61</sup> 2 Cor 5:18.

participation in his mission. The Spirit of Christ is as likely as not to make clear to us how he is at work in and through us. But our confidence is that he is always at work furthering his mission, moving it toward completion, from one generation to the next, for our children and our children's children.<sup>62</sup>

The value of my life, including whatever my work produces, comes from the Father's valuing me and his calling me to himself in Christ. My life and all that I produce has eternal meaning because I am now a participant in Christ's completion of creation through his redemption of the world.

At NLPC, as we pray for each other in our vocations, we affirm that our work is integral to the mission of God and our vocations are avenues of worship. We want our congregational praying to affirm God's presence in this immense area of our lives we call work. Thus the entire congregation, wherever each person is located in life, at this moment is participating in the mission of God. Calling is being enacted right now, and it is the worthy focus of our shared praying so that we may work with faith, hope, and love. Thus, prayer enables us to work more in collaboration and less in isolation, more with courage and less with fear, more with affirmation and less with doubt. In turn, the gifts of appreciation and affirmation are powerful graces by which God confirms that he knows us by name and he will not stop working until he makes each of his children complete.<sup>63</sup>

One of several prayers we have compiled for use in weekly congregational worship is a prayer of vocation written by Steve Garber:

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<sup>62</sup> Isa 44:3; Acts 2:39.

<sup>63</sup> "We can commit ourselves without reserve to all the secular work our shared humanity requires of us, knowing that nothing we do in itself is good enough to form part of that city's building, knowing that everything – from our most secret prayers to our most public political acts – is part of that sin-stained human nature that must go down into the valley of death and judgment, and yet knowing that as we offer it up to the Father in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, it is safe with him and – purged in fire – it will find its place in the holy city at the end." Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 136, in Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, Location 523, Kindle.

God of heaven and earth, we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Teach us to see our vocations and occupations as woven into your work in the world this week. For mothers at home who care for children, for those whose labor forms our common life in this city, the nation, and the world, for those who serve the marketplace of ideas and commerce, for those whose creative gifts nourish us all, for those whose callings take them into the academy, for those who long for employment that satisfies their souls and serves you, for each one we pray, asking for your great mercy. Give us eyes to see that our work is holy to you, O Lord, even as our worship this day is holy to you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

In the future we plan to personalize these prayers of vocation by interceding for congregants by name and by their area of work.

Also, I would like to incorporate into congregational worship a vocational vow written by Elizabeth O'Connor that could be used in a variety of occasions: when someone begins new work in Ithaca, when someone graduates and is preparing to pursue a vocational path, or when someone is preparing to leave Ithaca having accepted a new job. The vow affirms a commitment to faithful presence – our work is worship and is a participation in the mission of God.

Minister: Your work and your worship are intimately interwoven. In fact, they are not separate at all. Your work grows out of your worship and your worship grows out of your work. [Name], do you come today to acknowledge that the place you work is as holy as the place where you worship?

Participant: I do. Enabled by Christ's love for me, I shall endeavor to make each day's work a sacrament. I pray that my work will be cleansed of all spiritual or material selfishness, of all impatience and criticism, or all secret desire for recognition or reward. Turn, O God, my seeing into loving that I may witness to the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for all men. I pray in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Amen.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 5-6.



## Sacraments

The sacraments are signs and seals ordained by God to confirm his covenantal actions with his people and to mark his people as set apart for and devoted to his purpose. From Abraham's day to the present, God's people have always observed the sacraments as a way of declaring their relationship to the Lord as well as his redemptive provision upon which that relationship is established. No actions within the life of God's people are more important to our identity as Christian community than the sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist.

### *Baptism*

As understood within the covenantal tradition and paralleling its sacramental predecessor, circumcision, baptism stands as the inaugural step in the formation of Christian community. Normally applied at birth, but also on the occasion of adult conversion, those who are baptized belong to the church, to the visible community of God's people. When Peter proclaims at Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized,"<sup>65</sup> he does not mean that salvation is contingent upon baptism any more than it was upon circumcision before Pentecost. Rather Peter means, believe and belong. Integral to the redemptive work of Christ in the world by the Spirit is the formation of community.

In baptism God graciously immerses our children into the covenant community where they will learn what it means to receive the gospel and live a life with the work of the gospel firmly beneath their feet. Baptism, then, prompts the question: What does it mean to belong?

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<sup>65</sup> Acts 2:28.

The answer can take us many directions theologically, but I want to focus on its implications for community and calling. Baptism initiates the formation of a family, the family of God. The new birth<sup>66</sup> introduces new parents (“Our Father”<sup>67</sup>) and new siblings with Christ as our elder brother.<sup>68</sup> Our new family now takes precedence over our birth family,<sup>69</sup> because our identity and inheritance now come from this royal and divine bloodline.

When I administer the sacrament of baptism at NLPC, I take the occasion to help the congregation better understand the implications of being the family of God. In our order of worship, the final baptismal vow is made by the congregation to the parents of the infant or to the adult believer. To the one being baptized, we covenant, “We bind ourselves to you and commit ourselves to support you as you mature in life and in faith.” Suddenly calling is clearly in view. God, having called us to himself also calls us to belong to the community that bears his name. This work of covenantal parenting is central to our calling as we invite one another to believe and walk with one another in the practice of faithful presence in every area of life. This is the calling Jesus sets forth in the “Great Commission”<sup>70</sup> – we are all to be disciple-makers.

Of particular significance to me as a pastor is the opportunity to affirm those in the congregation who are single or childless. Many of these have aspirations of marriage, and many live with sadness at no prospects for marriage. Or, there are couples who cannot conceive or who have suffered the death of an child. In the act of baptism, in a mysterious yet tangible way, they can now hold this child in their arms as their own. God has made them to be a parent who will share in the responsibilities, joys, and even heartaches of caring

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<sup>66</sup> John 3:3, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Matt 6:9.

<sup>68</sup> Rom 8:29.

<sup>69</sup> Mark 3:35.

<sup>70</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

for covenant children as their own. Baptism confirms that the Christian community is called to be a family.

### *Eucharist*

The focal point of congregational worship is Christ, and nowhere in our liturgy is Christ more eloquently and clearly presented than in the Eucharist. At NLPC we made the decision several years ago to celebrate the Eucharist each week as the climax of congregational worship. While the sermon, the songs, and the readings provide important elaboration and application, all these roads lead from and lead to Christ and his finished work, the gospel.<sup>71</sup>

As with baptism the Eucharist is one of the defining actions of Christian community. Members of the family of God, in an act of covenant ratification, receive the elements and say, "Jesus is Lord! Christ has claimed us as his people, and together we respond with our whole-hearted devotion. The Eucharist is a drama that anticipates the consummation when people of every tribe and tongue and nation will come to Christ to worship, the bride of Christ united to Jesus at the great feast.

The impact of the Eucharist upon the community of God's people is particularly profound with respect to the practice of faithful presence. As the elements are presented to the people, the minister announces, "This is the body and blood of Christ." To what does this statement refer? To the elements themselves, or something more? While the elements proper are certainly in view, understood in the fullest context the statement refers to the community,<sup>72</sup> the assembled body that is the temple, the living presence of Christ in the

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<sup>71</sup> Rom 11:36.

<sup>72</sup> "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16); "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27).

world. The community is that body because of the work of Christ to which the elements point. Paul's charge to "discern the body"<sup>73</sup> has in view a proper regard for what makes this assembly laying hold of the elements a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's treasured possession, the beloved bride of Christ. A disregard for reconciliation and righteousness within the visible community totally contradicts and makes mockery of the gospel as proclaimed in the good news of the Eucharist. As we take vows in the celebration of baptism to carry out the work of Christ's commission, so we affirm in the Eucharist that we are being faithful to those vows to be disciple-makers wherever God has placed us in the world.

But consider the Eucharist declaration again, "This is the body and blood of Christ." Present tense. Christ is here, right now, in this place. Now, by virtue of his ubiquity as God, Christ is everywhere, but that's not the sense Paul has in mind. First, Jesus is distinctly present because of the relationship he has with his people. His presence here, right now, in this place is as the King, Shepherd, Lover, Brother, and Saviour of his people. Here, in this place, in the presence of this One who is before us, we stand in the kingdom of God. We proclaim his death, and resurrection, and ascension, until he comes again to bring creation to completion, to make all things new, and to spread the *shalom* of his rule over the entire creation. We are "participating"<sup>74</sup> in the body of Christ, in what Jesus came to do. We are engaged in his mission because the one who calls us is now sending us out to participate in his work. This is Ground Zero for the mission of God and the calling of God's people. Christ has come, and the liturgical flow of worship leads us to affirm our hope that Christ will come again. This is our mission. This is our calling, to practice faithful presence.

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<sup>73</sup> 1 Cor 11:27-29.

<sup>74</sup> 1 Cor 10:16.

Second, Jesus is distinctly present as the one who keeps his promise to us.<sup>75</sup> His commission to his people is framed by two promises apart from which we would have no hope of being able to do the work he has called us to do. He sends us with his power. We pursue our calling with the assurance that his omnipotence empowers our work to make our lives truly fruitful and meaningful. But he also accompanies us by his presence. He goes with us by his Spirit and in his body as we carry out the work he entrusts to us. “Here is the heart of Christian worship, . . . the concrete expression of Christ’s presence receiving us into his presence in order to send us out as his people.”<sup>76</sup>

This is a tremendous pastoral opportunity to underscore the sacredness of our work and the holiness of our lives in the world. Are you weary and disheartened by what you think is the futility of your labor? Are you proud of all that you have accomplished? Take heart. Repent. The omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth is at work when you work. Those feeble words you spoke, that half-hearted kindness, that inept attempt to be useful – God is at work, and nothing you have said or done is wasted. Are you alone, afraid, or disoriented? The God who is everywhere present is at your side, and the One who even still sympathizes with us as one of us will never leave you or forsake you.

Finally, “This is the body and blood of Christ.” This Christ is now clothed in flesh immortal. He has been raised so all who are in him will be raised and clothed with bodies just like his. The Eucharist does look back, as in the Passover, to the great Exodus won for us by our Great Deliverer. But, even more so, the sacrament looks forward (“till he comes”). The Eucharist is the celebration of firstfruits, the joy of our labor fulfilled.<sup>77</sup> Christ, the risen

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<sup>75</sup> Matt 28:18-20.

<sup>76</sup> Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> This is why the bread of the Eucharist should be leavened. The resurrected Christ is the true firstfruit (Lev 7:13; 23:9-18; Amos 4:5; 1 Cor 11:24; 15:20) inaugurating the great harvest to follow (John 4:35). The seed that has died and fallen into the ground now lives and bears much fruit (John 12:24).

Lord, is the firstfruits of the world made new. Because he is raised, we know with certainty that the reconciliation of the world is at hand and in his hand.

Our work will in many ways incarnate and anticipate the kingdom of God. The justice, righteousness, peace, love, and beauty that accompany our work are all real, and are true expressions of the kingdom. But they must not be confused with the kingdom itself. Therefore, take. Eat. Be nourished. With newfound strength and hope, pick up your tools, return to your work, encouraged that “in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.”<sup>78</sup>

### Sabbath

Much of work pushes back against the curse, against the consequences of the Fall. As a result, we often live with a persistent weariness. Work is never done, and even work that is done has to be done again. It is no surprise that Eastern religions depict life as an endless circle – a perpetual plodding round and round. Karma, Ying and Yang, and “what goes around comes around” are all ways of saying that the universe cannot be changed – the best we can do is preserve its fragile balance. These ideas all rise from honest observations about the relentless nature of life in a fallen world, a world which longs for rest, for Sabbath.

Both work and rest existed before the Fall – they were part of the unspoiled goodness of creation. What can this mean? We tend to think of rest as an antidote to weariness, but that cannot be the case in the beginning. Work before sin may have given God’s image bearers a satisfyingly vigorous workout, but it was not frustrating or painful. Therefore the rest of Sabbath could not have been given to humans as a way of calming jangled nerves, healing wounds, or comforting all the other toils and troubles that accompany work as we know it.

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<sup>78</sup> 1 Cor 15:58.

Rather Sabbath was work of another kind. The rest of Sabbath has always been work with a different focus and purpose.

Creational work focuses on the world – fill it, subdue it, work it, keep it. More particularly, it focuses on our relationship to the world. Since we work at God’s command and since we work out of love for him, there is no reason to think that rest exists only to make up for the deficiencies of work. Also, since God ordained that creational work take up most of our time, work does not rob him of anything he is due. To the contrary, work gives him all it was intended to give him and is, therefore, part of how we worship him.

The rest of Sabbath, then, before the Fall called for action that was distinct from creational labor. Let me suggest what a few of those actions are. *Meditation on God* – if life in the cosmos even before the Fall was “from him, through him, and to him” then the majesty of God’s person is the most creative inspiration imaginable. A day’s worth of reflection on the character and being of God would be enough to energize six days of labor that was motivated by a reminder of God’s love or the desire to reveal God’s glory. *Contentment* – since Satan was successful in making Adam and Eve discontent with paradise, we might say that our first parents fell because they abandoned the rest of Sabbath. Creational work as a culture-making enterprise involves tremendous change – expansion and elaboration, but not repair. However, change for us as image bearers always holds in tension the way things are at the moment and the way things will be in the future. So, the rest of Sabbath is an exercise in gratitude and contentment, affirming the goodness of the present as well as the goodness of God’s gifts. *Anticipation* – the creational charge to fill the earth and the whole enterprise of culture-making meant that even before the Fall the world was developing. Work means that the world has a future. Sabbath, then, has always been the sun rising on the eschatological

horizon. The rest of Sabbath is the consummational work that attends to the source, provision, and end of God's purpose in creation.

Sabbath continues to be this different kind of work even after the Fall. Now in the present, anticipation is both obscured because of sin and heightened with longing for things to be made right. Our work, embedded in the mission of God, keeps Sabbath hope alive with hints of what life will be like in the world made new. Contentment is also present relief from weariness and resistance of the cares of the world that would choke our heart. Our work, free of greed and competition, is able to live the Sabbath reality that God is enough. The rest of Sabbath continues to be about the worship of God, deliberately fixing our hearts on him to be renewed and changed into the likeness of Christ our Saviour. Work as worship lives out the Sabbath reality that Christ is Lord of all.

In what ways does Sabbath impact the formation of community at NLPC?

### *Worship*

Sabbath-oriented worship refocuses our life on God's mission and recalibrates the rhythm of our life. We live before the face of God longing to see his beauty.<sup>79</sup> Worship mobilizes and renews God's people for work and the practice of faithful presence.

### *Time*

No complaint about life in general is more common than "we are crazy busy!" Our commitment to practicing Sabbath has convinced NLPC leadership to schedule only one

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<sup>79</sup> Psa 27:4.



service on Sundays and to encourage families and the congregation to spend the day together renewing their relationships through rest, reflection, and recreation in God's presence. Also, we are reluctant to put too many events on the church calendar. We do not want to pull people away from their missional involvement with their neighbors and the city. As a pastor, I phrase it this way to the congregation: "If you can do only one thing at NLPC, attend weekly congregational worship. If you can do two things, attend worship and participate in a Home Fellowship Group for relational growth and nurturing. If you can do three things, attend worship, participate in a HFG, and find a place to serve either within the congregation or within the city." I realize that phrasing may suggest an artificial compartmentalization, but I believe it communicates our priority to make people's lives more purposeful, not more frenetic – our goal is to support the congregation in their work and in their relationships with family and community as they learn to practice faithful presence.

The institutional architecture of NLPC is light yet (hopefully) strategic. The visible structure exists to equip and encourage for sending. The NLPC strategy is to gather God's people by the gravitational pull of Sabbath long enough to refresh, ready, and return them to their calling and the advancement of the kingdom mission. The mechanics must serve the mission, and the focus of the mission is on what God is doing through his people as they fill the earth with the truth and reality of the kingdom.

### *Mercy*

The gentle rest of Sabbath calls us to be tender-hearted and to lavish the kindness God on those in need. The most basic way of connecting home (for singles and marrieds) with

the mission of God is through the practice of hospitality that includes the welcoming of those in material and spiritual need to our table. Sabbath, as it embodies the kindness of God, values the power and simplicity of presence, simply being with one another whether or not a word is spoken.

### *Joy*

The hope of Sabbath elicits deep joy by connecting the fulfillment of God's promise with the common stuff of life. Gathering for a meal to savor good food and drink is the foretaste of the banquet that awaits us when we are face to face with Christ. The happiness of children, the relief of forgiveness, and the liberty of healing all resonate with God's delight in making all things new. We invite one another to rejoice, to see the grace of God at hand, and to practice joy as a Sabbath encouragement to endure amidst very real hardship of the life that practices faithful presence.

### *Creation*

Sabbath is God's gift to us as his creatures – he has woven it into the fabric of creation as part of our humanness. Therefore, we value art and creativity as well as the natural beauty of the world. The deeply organic character of Sabbath presses us to link creation to the life of faithful presence. In our worship, our sacramental elements of service (the cup, the font, the plates) are the work of a local artist. The bread for the Eucharist comes from a local artisan baker. The music for worship is live, produced by the talent of musicians in the congregation. We engage in the stewardship of creation in our use of resources and by

recycling, and we delight in creation by making opportunities to hike, cycle, cook, attend concerts and films, garden, and be creative.

### *Work*

The rest of Sabbath should always be in view when we work and when we practice faithful presence. Work is not the absence of Sabbath. Rather, work that is a response to God's calling and work that finds its deepest meaning in creation, extends the *shalom* of God throughout the whole world and into every area of culture. It is an aroma of life in the kingdom of the One who has brought us rest.

### Discipleship

Central to the practice of faithful presence and the biblical view of calling is the discipleship of those who have been gathered into the local Christian community. Jesus' commission charges each of us and the community as a whole to engage in the life-long process of disciple-making, a journey that begins with baptism and the evangelistic summons to follow Christ and proceeds throughout life as faith matures and responds to all the circumstances of life. This process, which brings us individually and collectively to the fullness of Christlikeness,<sup>80</sup> requires the discipline of spiritual formation. To be a disciple is to be not only a follower, but also one whose life becomes more and more like the One we follow.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

<sup>81</sup> Matt 10:25.

Learning to follow Christ and participating in his work engage us in all the disciplines of discipleship.

Challenges of vocation require challenges of preparation. Only something like monastic discipline—only a way of life that includes Bible study, heartfelt prayer, actual confession, authentic accountability, strong friendship, careful speech, historically grounded liturgy, and an unapologetic insistence on quality—will stand against the ravaging tides of culture-wide exploitation, violence, and stupidity.<sup>82</sup>

Disciple-making and spiritual formation are the fruit of committed relationships and a growth that is nurtured in community. At NLPC we attempt to engage in relational disciple-making in three ways.

### *Mentoring*

Purposeful learning relationships may flow from social friendships, vocational collegiality, participation in Home Fellowship Groups, pastoral encouragement, or being thrown together in crisis. While mentoring can attempt to encourage growth in any area of life, the particular interest of this project is mentoring that encourages the practice of faithful presence.

Mentoring relationships are first of all *intentional*. They happen for the purpose of learning and growth. The mentor has a measure of confidence that he or she has something to offer, and the one being mentored has a willingness to ask for help. Mentoring relationships also require *discernment*. The mentor needs to possess sufficient insight to ask helpful questions and to probe areas that require most immediate attention. Mentoring relationships require *trust*, both the mentor's being trustworthy, and the one being mentored being willing to extend trust. Also, mentoring relationships depend on *resourcefulness*. No

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<sup>82</sup> John Stackhouse, "A Real Bonhoeffer for the Real World," *Cardus*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/4190/a-real-bonhoeffer-for-the-real-world> (accessed May 02, 2014).

mentor has all the answers or is experienced or competent in all areas of life, but a wise mentor knows where to go to get help.

Part of the broad efforts at leadership development at NLPC is the identification of potential mentors, men and women with sufficient gifts, experience, and maturity to be able to guide others. In encouraging these shepherding relationships, church leaders need to be available to guide and support the mentors.

### *Vocational Collegiality*

Most vocations involve work relationships: parents with children, employers with employees, or cooks shoulder to shoulder sweating it out on the line. We work alongside one another in our practice of faithful presence. But in the larger universe of work there are fellow Christians who are laboring in similar areas of vocation. Some of these co-laborers are in the local congregation or in the local community.

These vocational colleagues, whether they are local or long distance, understand best the needs and challenges of practicing faithful presence distinctive to their areas of work. There are ethical questions related to the making of jet engines used to power military warheads. There are principled questions that arise from industry demands for long hours and maximum profits. There are situational struggles related to loneliness, affirmation, productivity, temptation, pride, frustration, and weariness. Who better to speak to these concerns than someone who is in the same vocational circumstance or simply in the same place with the same desire to practice faithful presence.

A profound impact of vocational collegiality, or simply working with men and women who understand kingdom mission, is that the view of our own work can be reshaped, refined, and refocused.

As Nicholas Wolterstorff has written, Reformed Christians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rejected the old idea that each of us is born to be just one thing – a butch, a baker, a candlestick maker. Instead, each of us must find an occupation so intrinsically valuable and so naturally suited to us that, through it, we may add to the treasure of the Kingdom....We must not only find an occupation to bring to the Kingdom; we must *shape* it to suit this purpose.<sup>83</sup>

Such reshaping may mean learning to think differently about a job (perhaps the only one available to us) that is far removed from our preference. We endeavor to think of it through the lens of kingdom mission and God's calling. Such change of perspective almost always requires the encouragement and help from our kingdom-minded colleagues.<sup>84</sup>

One of the remarkable features of NLPC is the geographic and vocational diversity of our alumni scattered throughout the world. I have made some initial attempts to link several of our alumni in an effort to encourage some vocational disciple-making collegiality. My efforts have been primarily with alumni in literature, law, environment, music, and psychology. Most fruitful have been the efforts with alumni in literature and environment. Several friendships have been established, some of which have matured into mentoring relationships. This attempt to cultivate vocational networking is something I hope to expand and develop as a follow up to this project.

Also, my involvement with the Vocational Infusion Learning Community directed by Steve Garber, Stephen Grabill, and Amy Sherman will hopefully yield some greater skill in developing local vocational discipleship (possibly building on the FWF). My vision is to create a place to make the connection between work and faith, vocation and calling, as

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<sup>83</sup> Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> Greg Thompson calls these intentional vocational relationships "vocation-specific networks." Greg Thompson, Class lecture, Revisiting Christ and Culture course, Covenant Theological Seminary (2013).

Christians in Ithaca desire to learn to practice faithful presence and to participate in the mission of God. My hope is that this conversational space will be safe and inviting for non-Christians to enter the conversation through a shared desire to work well.

### *Pastoral Presence*

Lastly, pastoral presence in the work place can be a powerful affirmation that the church as well as God himself is interested in work and the work offered as worship by his sons and daughters. Not all work places are equally accessible to non-employees, so pastoral presence can range from sitting in the worker's office listening and praying together to sending an email offering a word of encouragement. But pastoral engagement in the area of work affirms that the church values each worker's participation in the mission of God. The pastor's presence functions not to pressure anyone into more church busyness, but to announce God's blessing and presence on this work and this place. God is here, and the church stands with you, committed to encouraging and equipping you in the practice of faithful presence.

## CONCLUSION

I am aware that none of the recommendations that I have offered are in themselves stunningly innovative. Their impact, I believe, will be in implementing them together and in inviting local congregations to rethink familiar practices in the light of community formation and calling. The most significant conclusion is that vocational discipleship should be a primary component of the mission of a local congregation. With that in mind, I offer these

recommendations with the hope that together our response to the calling of God will be a missional commitment to the practice of faithful presence and to a participation of God's completion of creation in Christ. May that hope be a lived reality in Ithaca, NY through the life and work of that Christian community known as New Life Presbyterian Church.

*Christ is not just the Lord of Christians;  
he is Lord of all, absolutely and without qualification.  
[Therefore] the entire membership of the Church in their secular occupations  
is called to be signs of his lordship in every area of life.*  
Lesslie Newbigin<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 40.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **FAITH AND WORK SEMINAR HANDOUT**

# FAITHFUL PRESENCE

*An Understanding & Practice of Calling*

## A PRAYER OF VOCATION

Written by Steve Garber

*God of heaven and earth, we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Teach us to see our vocations and occupations as woven into your work in the world this week. For mothers at home who care for children, for those whose labor forms our common life in this city, the nation, and the world, for those who serve the marketplace of ideas and commerce, for those whose creative gifts nourish us all, for those whose callings take them into the academy, for those who long for employment that satisfies their souls and serves you, for each one we pray, asking for your great mercy. Give us eyes to see that our work is holy to you,*

*O Lord, even as our worship this day is holy to you.*

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

*Steve Froehlich*

# CALLED TO GOD

*God joins us to Christ and to the mission of Christ in the world*

# CALLED TO WORK

*God created us to work and for work to further his creational purposes*

# CALLED INTO THE WORLD

*God created us for the world, a place of common and special grace*

# CALLED TO A WAY OF LIFE

*God created us to love him and our neighbor in every area of life*

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# CALLING

*Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him.*

*First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching), or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia).*

*Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think speak, live, and act entirely for him.*

~Os Guinness, *The Call*

# MISSION

*What is the Mission of God? It is to live as those who have experienced the*

*redeeming power of God already, and whose lives — individual and corporate — are signposts to the ultimate liberation of all creation and humanity from every form of oppression and slavery.*

*Our mission... means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.*

*It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission — God's mission.*

~ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People*

# WORK

## GENESIS 1-2

FILL: *the scope and character of our work — joyful, extravagant abundance that covers the earth and every area of life.*

SUBDUE: *our royal responsibilities and the God-like use of power in two ways: working and keeping.*

WORK: *creative culture-making in a life of worship.*

KEEP: *faithful stewardship in a life of worship.*

## MARK 16; MATTHEW 28

*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*

GO... MAKE DISCIPLES... BAPTIZE... TEACH

*The earth had been completely unformed and empty.... God had formed it and filled it — but not completely. People must now carry on the work of development: by being fruitful they fill it even more; by subduing it they must form it even more... as God's representatives, [we] carry on where God left off. But this is now to be a human development of the earth. The human race will fill the earth with its own kind, and it will form the earth for its own kind. From now on the development of the created earth will be societal and cultural in nature. The Bible is unique in its rejection of all attempts to either demonize some parts of Creation as the root of our problems or to idolize some part of creation as the solution. All other religions, philosophies, and worldviews in one way or another fall into the trap of [idolatry] — of failing to keep creation and fall distinct. And this trap is an ever-present danger for Christians [as well].* ~ Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*

*Who made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw material for politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the endless realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so make possible the theories of such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who moment by moment sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who maintains moment by moment the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same - God did it. And God does it.* ~Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*

# WORLD

## JEREMIAH 29:4-7

*This is what the Lord God of Israel says to all the exiles whom he has sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

*We are not redeemed out of creation, but as part of the redeemed creation itself*

*Christopher Wright, The Mission of God's People*

*The whole world is good*

*The whole world is fallen*

*The whole world is going to be redeemed*

*Tim Keller, Every Good Endeavor*

*The gospel, the good news, does not begin with Jesus' birth. It begins with the good earth that God made through Jesus. The great commission given us by Jesus in the New Testament must be held alongside the very first great commission God gave us at the start of the Bible.*

*Dave Bookless, Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World*

# WHY WORK?

Dorothy Sayers (*selections*)

Work is the natural exercise and function of man – the creature who is made in the image of his Creator.... Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It should be the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.

We should no longer think of work as something that we hasten to get through in order to enjoy our leisure; we should look on our leisure as the period of changed rhythm that refreshes us for the delightful purpose of getting on with our work.

It is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred. Christian people must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work, that is as true a vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work.... In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.... Work must be good work before it can call itself God's work.

Every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade – not outside it. The Apostles complained rightly when they said it was not meet they should leave the word of God and serve tables; their vocation was to preach the word. But the person whose vocation it is to prepare the meals beautifully might with equal justice protest: It is not meet for us to leave the service of our tables to preach the word.



# WHY WORK?

Dorothy Sayers (*selections, continued*)

Let the Church see to it that the workers are Christian people and do their work well, as to God: then all the work will be Christian work, whether it is church embroidery or sewage farming. As Jacques Maritain says: "If you want to produce Christian work, be a Christian, and try to make a work of beauty into which you have put your heart; do not adopt a Christian pose."

The second commandment depends upon the first, and that without the first, it is a delusion and a snare. Much of our present trouble and disillusionment have come from putting the second commandment before the first.

The only true way of serving the community is to be truly in sympathy with the community, to be oneself part of the community and then to serve the work without giving the community another thought. Then the work will endure, because it will be true to itself. It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work. . . . If work is to find its right place in the world, it is the duty of the Church to see to it that the work serves God, and that the worker serves the work.

# COMMON GRACE

Calvin Seerveld, *In the Fields of the Lord*

My father is a seller of fish. We sons know the business too, having worked from childhood in the Great South Bay Fish Market, Patchogue, Long Island, New York, helping our father like a quiver full of arrows. It is a small store, and it smells like fish. I remember a Thursday noon long ago when my Dad was selling a large carp to a prosperous Jewish woman, and it was a battle to convince her that the carp — ‘*Is it fresh?*’; it fairly bristled with freshness — had just come in, but the game was part of the sale. They had gone over it anatomically together: the eyes were bright, the gills were a good color, the flesh was firm, the belly was even spare and solid, the tail was not much waste, the price was right. Finally, my Dad held up the fish behind the counter, ‘*Beautiful, beautiful! Shall I clean it up?*’ And as the Jewish lady grudgingly assented, ruefully admiring the way the bargain had been struck, she said, ‘*My, you certainly didn’t miss your calling.*’

Unwittingly she spoke the truth. My father is in full-time service for the Lord, prophet, priest and king in the fish business. And customers who come in the store sense it. Not that we always have the cheapest fish in town! not that there are no mistakes on a busy Friday morning! not that there is no sin! But this: that little Great South Bay Fish Market, my father and two employees, is not only a clean, honest place where you can buy quality fish at a reasonable price with a smile, but there is a spirit in the store, a spirit of laughter, of fun, joy *inside* the buying and selling that strikes an observer pleasantly; and the strenuous week-long preparations in the back rooms for Friday fish-day are not a routine drudgery interrupted by ‘rest periods’, but again, a spirit seems to hallow the lowly work into a rich service in which it is good to officiate. When I watch my Dad’s hands, big beefy hands with broad stubby fingers each twice the thickness of mine, they could never play a piano: when I watch those hands delicately split the back of a mackerel or with a swift, true stroke fillet a flounder close to the bone, leaving all the meat together; when I know those hands dressed and peddled fish from the handlebars of a bicycle in the grim 1930s, cut and sold fish year after year through fire and sickness, thieves and disaster, weariness, winter cold and hot muggy summers, twinkling at work without complaint, past temptations, struggling day in and day out to fix a just price, in weakness often but always in faith consecratedly cutting up fish before the face of the Lord: when I see that, I know God’s Grace can come down to a man’s hand and the flash of a scabby fish-knife.

*Spirituality is life in the world oriented toward God*

Martin Luther

WORK IS WORSHIP

WORK IS LOVE FOR THE WORLD

**APPENDIX B**

**FAITH AND WORK FORUM NOTEBOOK**

# Faith & WORK

# Faith & WORK

The Faith & Work Forum is a research component of the Doctor of Ministry dissertation/project of Steve Froehlich entitled *Faithful Presence: How Community Formation Shapes the Understanding and Practice of Calling*. Thank you for your participation in this study and your contribution to this research. I pray that the effort is a help and blessing to you, and that the fruit of this work helps God's people more confidently, wisely, joyfully, and fruitfully further the mission of God in the world.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

# GOALS

The Faith & Work Forum aims to explore and apply a biblical understanding of God's call to the Christian community in the real-life intersection of faith, work, and mission.

## **1 What is “calling”?**

*Understanding how work is related to the life of faith and the call to follow Christ and to pursue the mission of God.*

## **2 How do faith and work complement and conflict?**

*Learning to be faithful to Christ in the tension of competing loyalties and responsibilities in work, and to celebrate grace present in work.*

## **3 How can the Church help you be faithful in your work?**

*Discovering ways your local congregation can better encourage and equip you for work and the practice of “faithful presence.”*

# SCHEDULE

The Faith & Work Forum aims to explore and apply a biblical understanding of God's call to the Christian community in the real-life intersection of faith, work, and mission.

**1** Called to God  
*God joins us to Christ and to the mission of Christ in the world*

**2** Called to Work  
*God created us to work and for work to further his creational purposes*

**3** Called into the World  
*God created us for the world, a place of common and special grace*

**4** The Intersection of Faith and Work in the World  
*Seeing grace and working out the conflicts*

**5** Called to a Way of Life  
*God created us to love him and our neighbor in every area of life*

**6** How the Church Helps Us Practice Faithful Presence  
*Forming a covenant community that values work as worship*

# RECOMMENDED READING

The following resources will further your study of faith and work, but are not required reading for the Faith & Work Forum. They are helpful elaborations and applications of biblical teaching on the relationship of faith, work, calling, and mission.

Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.

Catron, Janice. *God's Vision, Our Calling*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2003.

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Diehl, William E. *In Search of Faithfulness*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Guinness, Os. *The Call*. Nashville: The W Publishing Group, 1998.

Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World*. New York: Oxford, 2010.

Keller, Timothy. *Every Good Endeavor*. New York: Dutton, 2012.

Mouw, Richard. *He Shines in All That's Fair*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001.

Sayers, Dorothy. "Why Work?" *Creed or Chaos?* New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1949.

Sherman, Amy. *Kingdom Calling*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011.

Veith, Gene Edward Jr. *God at Work*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002.

Wright, Christopher. *The Mission of God's People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.



# OUR CALLING

Calling begins when God calls us to himself.

## 1. We are called to God

Reconciliation: God calls us to himself in salvation.

Relationship

God's call unites us to Christ

God's call unites us to the Body of Christ

God's call unites us to the Mission of God in Christ

Where does God's purpose take us?

### a. Toward the **source** of the gospel: FAITH

*How the gospel comes to us*

Submission to God's Love

Submission to One Another

Submission to God's Right

### b. Toward the **need** for the gospel: BROKENNESS

*Why the gospel comes to us*

### c. Toward the **hope** of the gospel: GLORY

*What the gospel begins in us*

# WHY WORK?

Work is born of identity and necessity.

We work because we are God's image-bearers.

*Work is good.*

We work because we seek the restoration of *shalom*.

*Work is redemptive.*

# WORK

Dorothy Sayers, "*Why Work?*"

Work is the natural exercise and function of man – the creature who is made in the image of his Creator. . . . Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It should be the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.

We should no longer think of work as something that we hasten to get through in order to enjoy our leisure; we should look on our leisure as the period of changed rhythm that refreshes us for the delightful purpose of getting on with our work.

It is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred. Christian people must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work, that is as true a vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work. . . . In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. . . . Work must be good work before it can call itself God's work.

# WORK

Dorothy Sayers, “*Why Work?*”

(continued)

Every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade – not outside it. The Apostles complained rightly when they said it was not meet they should leave the word of God and serve tables; their vocation was to preach the word. But the person whose vocation it is to prepare the meals beautifully might with equal justice protest: It is not meet for us to leave the service of our tables to preach the word.

Let the Church see to it that the workers are Christian people and do their work well, as to God: then all the work will be Christian work, whether it is church embroidery or sewage farming. As Jacques Maritain says: “If you want to produce Christian work, be a Christian, and try to make a work of beauty into which you have put your heart; do not adopt a Christian pose.”

The second commandment depends upon the first, and that without the first, it is a delusion and a snare. Much of our present trouble and disillusionment have come from putting the second commandment before the first.

The only true way of serving the community is to be truly in sympathy with the community, to be oneself part of the community and then to serve the work without giving the community another thought. Then the work will endure, because it will be true to itself. It is the work that serves the community; the business of the worker is to serve the work. . . . If work is to find its right place in the world, it is the duty of the Church to see to it that the work serves God, and that the worker serves the work.

# VOCATION

*vocare*

Internal Calling

External Calling

# CALLING

To What Does God Call Us?

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.*

Romans 1:1-7

Called to \_\_\_\_\_  
*called to be an apostle*

Called to \_\_\_\_\_  
*called to belong to Jesus Christ*

Called to \_\_\_\_\_  
*called to be saints*

# CALLING

*Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him.\*  
First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching), or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia). Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think speak, live, and act entirely for him.\*\**

~Os Guinness, *The Call*

*\*From him and through him and to him are all things.*

Romans 11:36

*In him we live and move and have our being*

Acts 17:28

*\*\*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.*

*Love your neighbor as yourself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*

Matthew 22:37-40 (cf. Dt 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; Josh 22:5; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27)

# CALLING

Calling begins when God calls us to himself.

*Having called us to a person, himself,  
Yahweh calls his image bearers to a purpose rooted in  
Creation and Redemption.*

*He also calls us to a place, the Creation itself in which  
that purpose unfolds.*

*Finally, he calls us to a plan, a model by which he employs  
his image bearers to further his mission in the world.*

1. We are called... to God
2. We are called... to Work
3. We are called... into the World
4. We are called... into a Way of Life



# OUR WORK

## 2. We are called to Work

Work in Creation (Gen 1-2).

God works (and rests) so we work (and rest)

God created humans in his own image

God commissions humans to work

FILL: the scope and character of our work – joyful, extravagant abundance that covers the earth and every area of life.

SUBDUE: our royal responsibilities and the God-like use of power in two ways: working and keeping.

WORK: creative culture-making in a life of worship.

KEEP: faithful stewardship in a life of worship.

Work is worship

The separation of worship and work results in either

IDOLATRY

INDIFFERENCE/ISOLATION

Work in Redemption (Mt 28)

“far as the curse is found”

to “all the families of the earth”

to “the whole creation”

Work and Mission

# WORK

God blessed them.

God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over every living thing on the earth."

Genesis 1:26-28

FILL

SUBDUE

# WORK

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

Genesis 2:15

## WORK

When culture-making becomes detached from worship

*NOT loving the Lord our God with our whole being*

---

When worship becomes incompatible with culture-making

*NOT loving our neighbors as ourselves*

---

## KEEP

# CREATION

God tells the story of Creation to Job. What characteristics distinguish this telling of Creation from the 2 accounts in Genesis 1-2?

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>4</sup>"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup>Who determined its measurements - surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? <sup>6</sup>On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, <sup>7</sup>when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? <sup>8</sup>Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, <sup>9</sup>when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, <sup>10</sup>and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, <sup>11</sup>and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'? <sup>12</sup>Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, <sup>13</sup>that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? <sup>14</sup>It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. <sup>15</sup>From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken. <sup>16</sup>Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? <sup>17</sup>Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? <sup>18</sup>Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this. <sup>19</sup>Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness, <sup>20</sup>that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? <sup>21</sup>You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! <sup>22</sup>Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, <sup>23</sup>which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? <sup>24</sup>What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? <sup>25</sup>Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt, <sup>26</sup>to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, <sup>27</sup>to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass? <sup>28</sup>Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew? <sup>29</sup>From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the frost of heaven? <sup>30</sup>The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. <sup>31</sup>Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? <sup>32</sup>Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? <sup>33</sup>Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? <sup>34</sup>Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? <sup>35</sup>Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? <sup>36</sup>Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind? <sup>37</sup>Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, <sup>38</sup>when the dust runs into a mass and the clods stick fast together? <sup>39</sup>Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, <sup>40</sup>when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in their thicket?

<sup>41</sup>Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help, and wander about for lack of food? <sup>39:1</sup>Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the does? <sup>2</sup>Can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth, <sup>3</sup>when they crouch, bring forth their offspring, and are delivered of their young? <sup>4</sup>Their young ones become strong; they grow up in the open; they go out and do not return to them. <sup>5</sup>Who has let the wild donkey go free? Who has loosed the bonds of the swift donkey, <sup>6</sup>to whom I have given the arid plain for his home and the salt land for his dwelling place? <sup>7</sup>He scorns the tumult of the city; he hears not the shouts of the driver. <sup>8</sup>He ranges the mountains as his pasture, and he searches after every green thing. <sup>9</sup>Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will he spend the night at your manger? <sup>10</sup>Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes, or will he harrow the valleys after you? <sup>11</sup>Will you depend on him because his strength is great, and will you leave to him your labor? <sup>12</sup>Do you have faith in him that he will return your grain and gather it to your threshing floor? <sup>13</sup>The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, but are they the pinions and plumage of love? <sup>14</sup>For she leaves her eggs to the earth and lets them be warmed on the ground, <sup>15</sup>forgetting that a foot may crush them and that the wild beast may trample them. <sup>16</sup>She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear, <sup>17</sup>because God has made her forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding. <sup>18</sup>When she rouses herself to flee, she laughs at the horse and his rider. <sup>19</sup>Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? <sup>20</sup>Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. <sup>21</sup>He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. <sup>22</sup>He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. <sup>23</sup>Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin. <sup>24</sup>With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. <sup>25</sup>When the trumpet sounds, he says 'Aha!' He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. <sup>26</sup>Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? <sup>27</sup>Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? <sup>28</sup>On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold. <sup>29</sup>From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away. <sup>30</sup>His young ones suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is he."

<sup>40:3</sup>Then Job answered the Lord and said: <sup>40</sup>"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. <sup>5</sup>I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further."

Job 38:3-40:5

*Who made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw material for politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the endless realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so make possible the theories of such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who moment by moment sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who maintains moment by moment the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same - God did it. And God does it.*

~ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*

# MISSION

What is the mission of God's people?

It is to live as those who have experienced that redeeming power of God already, and whose lives – individual and corporate – are signposts to the ultimate liberation of all creation and humanity from every form of oppression and slavery.

Our mission... means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.

Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People*

# OUR WORLD

## 3. We are called into the World

Our relationship to the world is to embody God's relationship to the world.

- \* God is present in the world
  - ❖ He is *missionally* present (Ps 139)
  - ❖ He is *mysteriously* present (Mt 19:6; 1 Cor 6:15; 7:14)
  - ❖ He is *mediately* present (1 Cor 12:7)
- \* God loves the world (John 3:16)
  - ❖ People and institutions are not our enemy (Eph 6:12)
- \* God is holding, preserving, redeeming, and completing the world. (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17)
  - ❖ Matter matters

Common Grace theology and thinking...

- \* lays a foundation for Christian participation in civil society.
- \* promotes a theologically responsible approach to both commonness and differentness as we relate to those who reject the biblical message.
- \* combats the historic evangelical tendency to devalue works of mercy and artistic creations except as entry points for Evangelism. Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*

God is everywhere present in Creation accomplishing his purpose in Creation and Redemption

- \* We should expect to see, receive, and give thanks for God's grace in Creation, even in the lives of those who do not know and worship him
- \* We should expect God to use his grace-gifting in our work to be grace-bearing in furthering his purpose in Creation and Redemption

Spirituality: "life in the world oriented toward God" ~ Martin Luther

# THE WORLD

The whole world is \_\_\_\_\_

The whole world is \_\_\_\_\_

The whole world is \_\_\_\_\_

Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

We are not redeemed \_\_\_\_\_ creation, but as

\_\_\_\_\_ the redeemed creation itself

Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People*

The world is moved toward completion through the human agency of work.

1. We \_\_\_\_\_

2. We \_\_\_\_\_

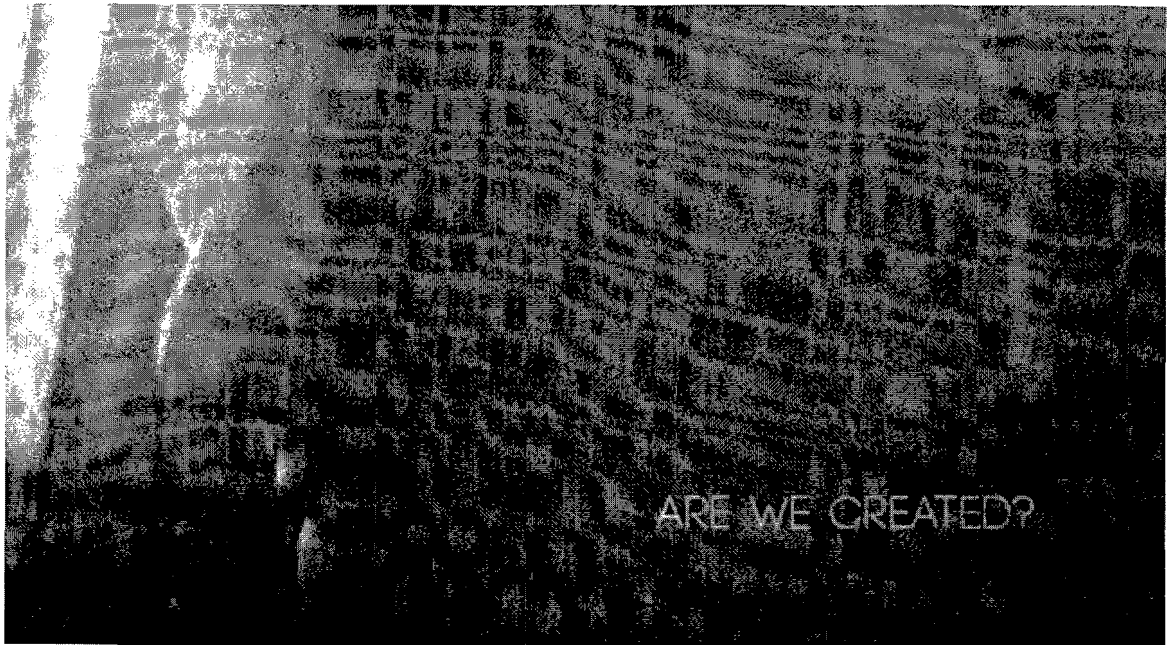
3. We \_\_\_\_\_

4. We \_\_\_\_\_



# CREATED FOR BEAUTY

Andy Crouch



[www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=sGJxzrlgHYs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=sGJxzrlgHYs)

# THE WORLD & GOD

Our relationship to the world is to embody God's relationship to the world.

How do you know God loves the world?

Because God loves the world, matter \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways is God present in the world holding it, redeeming it,  
and completing it?

1. He is \_\_\_\_\_ present

2. He is \_\_\_\_\_ present

3. He is \_\_\_\_\_ present

# THE WORLD & GRACE

In what ways do you expect God's grace-gifting to be grace-bearing in our work?

*Remember, if God's Creational purpose is completed through Christ's Redemptive work, what are some ways that God's grace-gifting through our Creational work is complementary and vital to Christ's work in Redemption?*

# COMMON GRACE

Calvin Seerveld, *In the Fields of the Lord*

My father is a seller of fish. We sons know the business too, having worked from childhood in the Great South Bay Fish Market, Patchogue, Long Island, New York, helping our father like a quiver full of arrows. It is a small store, and it smells like fish. I remember a Thursday noon long ago when my Dad was selling a large carp to a prosperous Jewish woman, and it was a battle to convince her that the carp — *'Is it fresh?'*; it fairly bristled with freshness — had just come in, but the game was part of the sale. They had gone over it anatomically together: the eyes were bright, the gills were a good color, the flesh was firm, the belly was even spare and solid, the tail was not much waste, the price was right. Finally, my Dad held up the fish behind the counter, *'Beautiful, beautiful! Shall I clean it up?'* And as the Jewish lady grudgingly assented, ruefully admiring the way the bargain had been struck, she said, *'My, you certainly didn't miss your calling.'*

Unwittingly she spoke the truth. My father is in full-time service for the Lord, prophet, priest and king in the fish business. And customers who come in the store sense it. Not that we always have the cheapest fish in town! not that there are no mistakes on a busy Friday morning! not that there is no sin! But this: that little Great South Bay Fish Market, my father and two employees, is not only a clean, honest place where you can buy quality fish at a reasonable price with a smile, but there is a spirit in the store, a spirit of laughter, of fun, joy *inside* the buying and selling that strikes an observer pleasantly; and the strenuous week-long preparations in the back rooms for Friday fish-day are not a routine drudgery interrupted by 'rest periods', but again, a spirit seems to hallow the lowly work into a rich service in which it is good to officiate. When I watch my Dad's hands, big beefy hands with broad stubby fingers each twice the thickness of mine, they could never play a piano: when I watch those hands delicately split the back of a mackerel or with a swift, true stroke fillet a flounder close to the bone, leaving all the meat together; when I know those hands dressed and peddled fish from the handlebars of a bicycle in the grim 1930s, cut and sold fish year after year through fire and sickness, thieves and disaster, weariness, winter cold and hot muggy summers, twinkling at work without complaint, past temptations, struggling day in and day out to fix a just price, in weakness often but always in faith consecratedly cutting up fish before the face of the Lord: when I see that, I know God's Grace can come down to a man's hand and the flash of a scabby fish-knife.

# GOD, THE WORLD & BEAUTY

Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work.

Exodus 36:2

Hiram from Tyre was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali. His father was a man of Tyre, a worker in bronze.

He was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze.

He cast two pillars of bronze.

Each pillar was eighteen cubits (27') tall, and twelve cubits (18') in circumference (4 cubits or 6' in diameter)

Each was hollow, and four fingers in thickness

He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars.

Each capital was five cubits (7.5') tall.

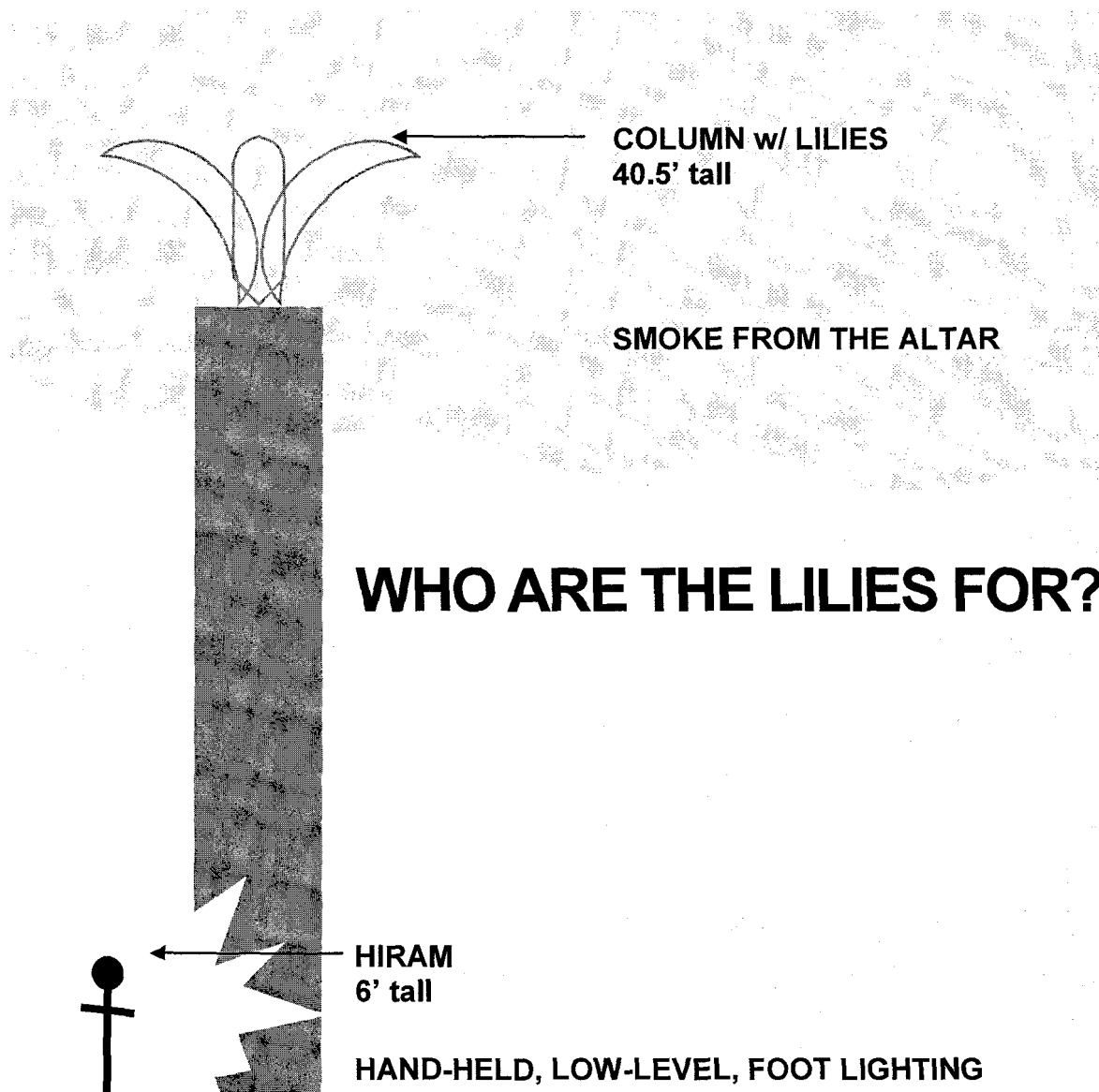
Each had lattices of checker work with wreaths of chain work for the capitals on the tops of the pillars.

He made 200 pomegranates in two rows around the lattice.

Each capital on top of each pillar was of lily-work four cubits (6')

I Kings 7:13-22

## WHO ARE THE LILIES FOR?



# FAITH & WORK TENSIONS

## SPIRITUAL vs MATERIAL

The world is in every way polluted by sin. Therefore, it's easy to feel like handling the stuff of the world (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) is un-spiritual or anti-spiritual. We are told in Scripture to live all of life to the glory of God. Yet, it often feels like the material world tainted by sin gets in the way of living for God's glory. Is devoting our work to material things (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) spiritual in character? If it is (or, if it can be), how do we learn to view the material world as spiritual? If Creational work is good, what does it mean to value the work for what it is (or, as Dorothy Sayers says, Valuing the work *for the sake of the work*)? If Creational work is good, how can/should it be informed by Christ's Redemptive work and our call to be disciple-makers (Mt 28)? How can we engage in the work of disciple-making without neglecting or devaluing Creational work which we are called to do?

## EXPLICIT vs IMPLICIT

We are called to be disciple-makers (Mt 28). This is the whole-life endeavor of the Church as a community that summons and helps people toward maturity in Christ. But, does work that is more Creationally-oriented (plumbing, politics, music, medicine) contribute to the more explicitly Redemptive work of disciple-making? If it does, to what degree or in what ways should we endeavor to make more Creationally-oriented work more explicitly Redemptive? Or, how should we endeavor to regard more Creationally-oriented work as Redemptive? If we find ourselves in situations in which the culture restricts our opportunities to be explicitly Redemptive (e.g. employees may not discuss religious beliefs at work), to what degree are we called to be "against culture" by ignoring or opposing those restrictions. If God uses all our work Redemptively, to what degree should we be content simply to do our work well? How does plumbing, for example, express obedience to the Redemption Commission (Mt 28)? How does preaching, for example, express obedience to the Creation Commission (Gen 1-2)?

## GIFTS vs RESPONSIBILITY

We are all gifted by God in personal ways, and we acknowledge that the receipt of gifts from God requires stewardship of those gifts. One important reason for the variety of gifting is to make the Body of Christ whole, a mature and mutually-dependent presence in the world. Also, the variety of gifting channels our work into every area of culture. To what degree should we focus on our gifting and allow others who are differently gifted to focus on those areas? We might say, "I'm a doer, not a talker," or "I'm a plumber not a preacher." While that assessment may accurately reflect our gifting, does gifting free us from the responsibility of working outside our area of primary gifting? When does Redemptive urgency override Creational necessity? For instance, as Dorothy Sayers suggests, should the Acts 7 workers at table ever be compelled to lay aside the work at tables for which they have been gifted because the preaching of the Word is more urgently needed?

#### DESIRE vs DUTY

We usually aspire to work in areas that we find fulfilling and that we regard as meaningful. We often look to desire as a significant guide in choosing our work. We look for work that hits the “sweet spot” of desire and opportunity. But, thinking of work in terms of desire (or, “passion”) is often a privilege, perhaps even a luxury. Much of work is often forced upon us by necessity (“I just have to pay the bills”) or is reduced to what is available in a given circumstance (“It’s the only job I could find”). When do I hold out for work that hits the “sweet spot,” and when do I decide to be contented with the work that is available?

#### SUCCESS vs FUTILITY

We want our work to be productive. We want to reach our goals and make a difference. Plus, we want God’s blessing on every area of our lives. Does success equal God’s blessing? How often does work done for God’s glory produce Redemptive results? How regularly should we expect the work of disciple-making to result in the making of disciples? How do we regard the Creational and Redemptive significance of our work when we fail or fall short of our goals? To what degree is success or failure a reliable indicator of God’s use of our work? If success is not a reliable measure that we are working well or that God is blessing our work, to what degree should we strive for success or be indifferent to failure? How important is it that we see how God uses our work to make disciples or to produce human flourishing?

#### LOCAL vs GLOBAL

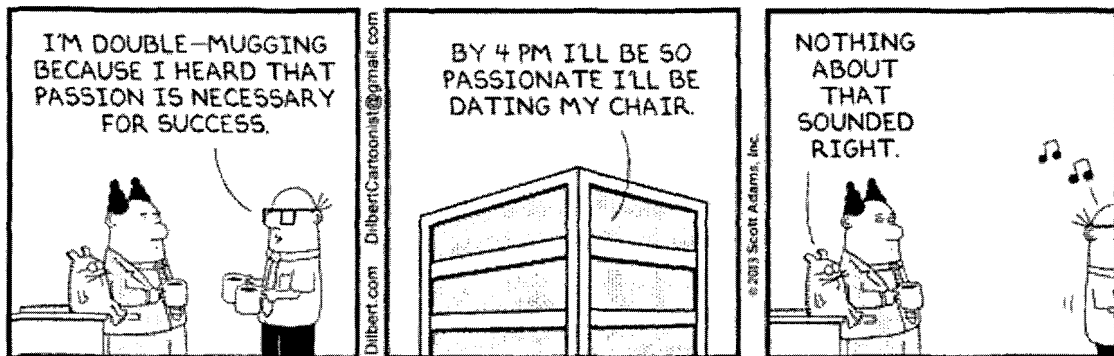
Thanks to the media the needs of the world relentlessly come crashing into our lives. The mission of God is certainly global, and technology and transportation make participating in global concerns a possibility. Is going better than staying? Does going represent a higher commitment to the mission of God? Is it selfishly indifferent to the enormous needs of the world to focus on our local work? Is it naïve to value global work over local work? How does God’s promise to bless all the nations of the world and to bless the whole earth through his people inform how I approach my local work?

#### URGENCY vs REST

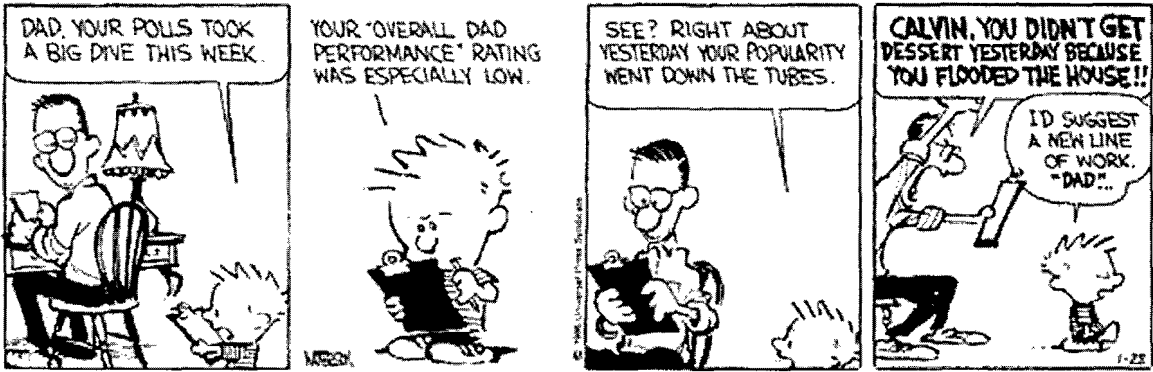
We engage in work out of desire and necessity. We work because we want to and because we need to. But, desire becomes idolatry and necessity becomes the tyranny of the urgent. Then, work demands that are pressed upon us too easily become dehumanizing tyranny. The baby is screaming and something has to be done. But of course the baby would start screaming just as the casserole is supposed to come out of the oven. So, do I run to care for baby, or do I save dinner? My employer or supervisor expects non-stop work until the project is completed, with no thought given to how this demand impacts my life and health. The 6 and 1 rhythm of Creational work and rest means that most of life is occupied by work. But does work crowd out rest. Or, does rest become an excuse for indifference and indolence? How does the rest of new life in Christ inform our response to the idolatry and tyranny that often accompany work?



# DILBERT ON PASSION

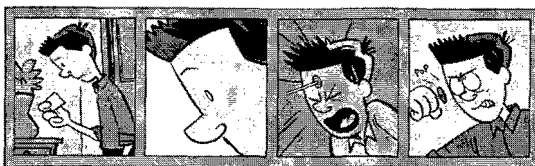
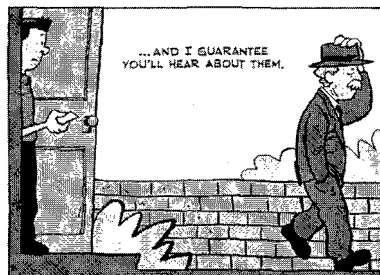
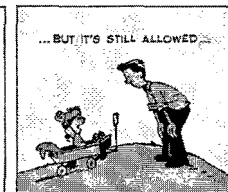
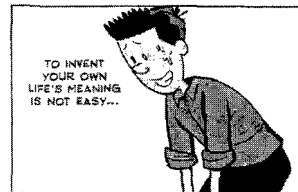
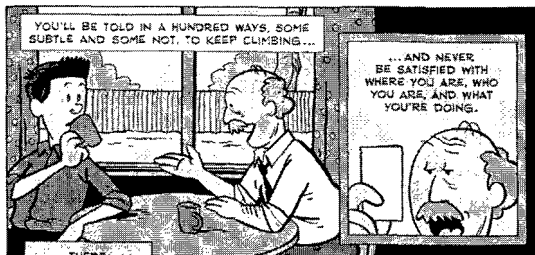
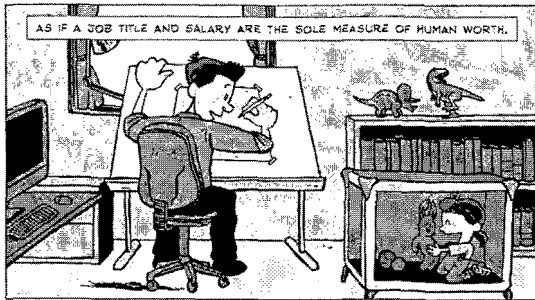
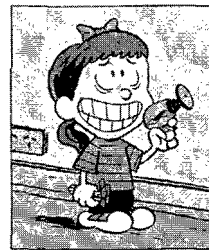
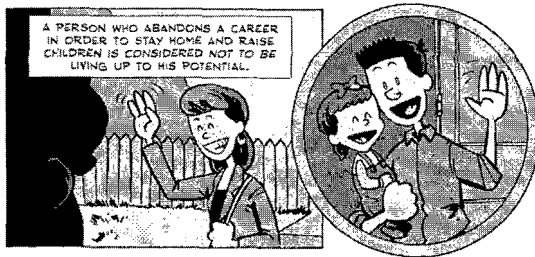


# CALVIN ON PERFORMANCE



# WATTERSON ON WORK





# OUR WAY OF LIFE

## 4. We are called to a way of life - “faithful presence”

*Work is a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God.... Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.*

~ Dorothy Sayers

Faithfulness presupposes

- Presence

God's presence with us in the world

Our presence with others in the world

- Community

We were made for community (Creation)

We are to learn live as a new community (Redemption)

*At root, a theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God's faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return.... When the Word of all flourishing — defined by the love of Christ — becomes flesh in us, in our relations with others, within the tasks we are given, and within our sphere of influence — absence gives way to presence, and the word we speak to each other and to the world becomes authentic and trustworthy. This is the heart of a theology of presence.... The practice of faithful presence, then, generates relationships and institutions that are fundamentally covenantal in character, the ends of which are the fostering of meaning, purpose, truth, beauty, belonging, and fairness — not just for Christians but for everyone*

~ James Davison Hunter

# FAITHFUL PRESENCE

## I. LIVING IN CONTEXT

*Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service. ~ Os Guinness*

### A. Living FOR

Love the Lord our God with your whole being

Love your neighbor as yourself

### B. Living AGAINST

**Transience** describes our loss of ability or willingness to attach to those elements of culture that provide stability, coherence, and significance.

**Depersonalization (including Commodification)** points to ways in which cultural forces have eroded a commonly-held sense of self and significance and have undermined our understanding of what it means to be human.

**Theological Confusion - Biblical Illiteracy:** Christians manifest great confusion about the Gospel and calling. For many followers of Christ the connection between what makes them Christian (the Gospel) and the significance of living our lives as Christians (calling) is fuzzy at best.

**Individualism:** Nowhere in the Church has there been greater capitulation to the culture at large than in the loss of community. Individualism is as pervasive and normalized in the way Christians relate to God, to one another, and to the world as it is outside the Church.

# FAITHFUL PRESENCE

## II. LIVING WITH CHARACTER

In one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. Therefore, though many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:

if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;	if service, in our serving;
the one who teaches, in teaching;	the one who exhorts, in exhortation
the one who contributes, in generosity;	the one who leads, with zeal;
the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.	

Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit, and serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.

Never be wise in your own sight.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

~ Romans 12:4-21

# FAITHFUL PRESENCE

## III. LIVING FROM COMMISSION

Creation Commission	Church's Commission	Continuing Commission
Be fruitful	Go to the whole creation	Fill the world
Have dominion	Make disciples	Extend the Kingdom
Work	Baptize	Be culture-makers
Keep	Teach	Be faithful stewards

*We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own, rejoyce [sic] together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.*

~John Winthrop

*Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime.  
Therefore we must be saved by hope.*

~Reinhold Niebuhr



# FAITH & WORK IN THE CHURCH

## VISION

Be Intentional

Purpose to encourage and equip congregants to practice Faithful Presence

## INSTRUCTION

Sermons

Teaching

## WORSHIP

*The practice of Faithful Presence requires a integral relationship among worship, work, and the world*

Integral NOT Instrumental

Integral: essential or necessary to one another's existence or identity. Valuable for what something is. (balancing my checkbook is a good thing)

Instrumental: valuable only as a means to an end (balancing my checkbook is good because it makes me feel better)

Prayer - public congregational praying

Intercession - praying for one another and our work (needs, conflicts, hopes)

Blessing - declaring God's favor on our work

Celebration - rejoicing in God at work through our work

Sacrament - regular engagement with the signs and seals of God's covenant with his people and the world

God's presence

God's power

God's purpose

Sabbath - How do you know your work is faith full? The practice of rest.

## DISCIPLESHIP

Mentoring

Professional Collegiality

Personal Camaraderie

# PRAYERS FOR VOCATION

God of heaven and earth, we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Teach us to see our vocations and occupations as woven into your work in the world this week. For mothers at home who care for children, for those whose labor forms our common life in this city, the nation, and the world, for those who serve the marketplace of ideas and commerce, for those whose creative gifts nourish us all, for those whose callings take them into the academy, for those who long for employment that satisfies their souls and serves you, for each one we pray, asking for your great mercy. Give us eyes to see that our work is holy to you, O Lord, even as our worship this day is holy to you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

~Steve Garber

Thank you God for the privilege of working in this world you have created. Thank you for allowing us to share with you in the joy of creation and in the joy of creating. You also have allowed us to experience your new work of redemption through our work. So we ask today that where there is brokenness we might see Christ the healer at work. Where there is strife that we might participate with Him as a peacemaker. Where there is anxiety that we might experience your peace within. Lord we pray that whatever circumstances we find ourselves in today that we might see in them, through them and beyond them to your eternal kingdom. Through our work, do your work of making us like your Son so that your kingdom may come, and your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We ask this in the name of our savior Christ Jesus. Amen

~Hans Hess

“Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work You give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of Him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.”

~Bill Haley (from the Book of Common Prayer)

# PRAYERS FOR VOCATION

God of heaven and earth, you promise to make your blessings known as far as the curse is found. We pray for that, and we live for that. In our vocations and occupations, give us the wisdom and grace and skill to keep on keeping on, that the work of our hands will be integral to that blessing in the worlds of business and banking, politics and the arts, education and the law, health care and international development, at home and all over the world— as far as the curse is found. Amen and amen.

~Steve Garber

Almighty God and Author of Creation, give us guidance to carry out the work you have created us to do. Help us go about our work with obedience to Christ's command to love our neighbor, lest we labor in vain. Let us not be tempted to build our life's vocation around how the world rewards us but rather focus on how our work can be counted on for Your Kingdom come on earth. It is in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Hope for the World to come that we pray, Amen.

~George Connors

"Oh God, whose wonders and wisdom are more than we can fathom, whose ways transcend our own, grant us a new glimpse of your goodness, glory, and grace, that we might know who you are and what you've done, and in that light, how we get to live. Pierce through the temporal that we might see the eternal, give us eyes to see the normally unseen, that our vision might be rightly ordered, that we might walk in the ways that we now see. Grant us to know the dignity of our calling, that in knowing we might do, for your sake, for our sake, and for the sake of the world you have created and will make new. Amen."

~Bill Haley

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

~Book of Common Prayer

# SUPPLEMENTS

Supplements include:

“Why Work?” by Dorothy Sayers

“Learning in Wartime” by C.S. Lewis

“Calvin and Common Grace” by Herman Bavinck

“Leaf by Niggle” by JRR Tolkien

## **APPENDIX C**

### **FAITH AND WORK FORUM SURVEY RESULTS**



## Summary Report - Auto Run

Survey: Faith & Work Forum - intake survey

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16 participants  
17 completed intake surveys  
12 completed exit surveys

Thanks to each of you for your help with this project.

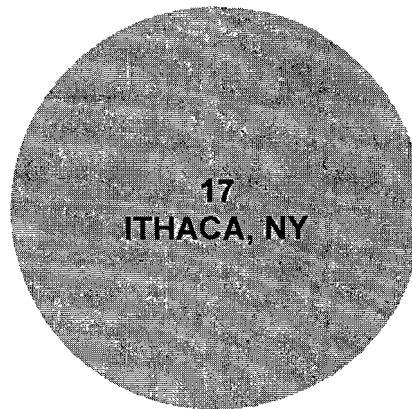
This survey will give me some anonymous background information about what understanding and experience you are bringing to the Faith & Work Forum. It will serve as a point of reference at the close of the FWF to get a sense of how your thinking and attitudes may have changed as a result of the FWF. I plan to give you an exit survey that will re-ask you some of these questions.

Please don't over-think these questions. Go with your initial impressions.

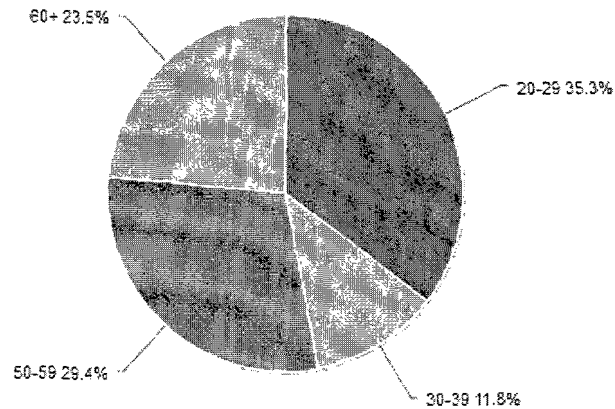
Thank you.

Steve

My thanks to Amy Sherman (Ph.D.; Senior Fellow, Sagamore Institute Faith in Communities) for questions adapted from resources created by the Vocation Infusion Learning Community (c) 2011 by Amy L. Sherman. Reprinted with permission from the author. For more resources, visit [www.vocationalstewardship.org](http://www.vocationalstewardship.org).



## 2. Location of respondents.



## 3. What is your age?

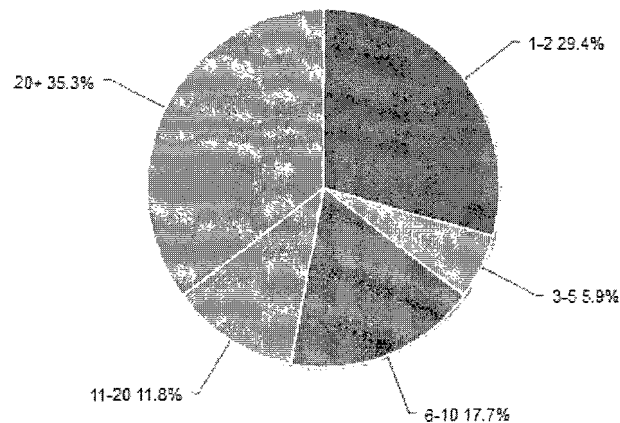
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
20-29	6	35.3%	Total	17
30-39	2	11.8%	Responses	
40-49	0	0.0%	Sum	670.0
50-59	5	29.4%	Avg	39.4
60+	4	23.5%	StdDev	16.6
			Max	60.0

9. What is your primary area of work?(e.g. education, horticulture)

Count	Response
3	Education
2	Engineering
2	Human Services
1	Management
1	Graduate School
1	Chemical Engineering
2	Natural Resources
1	Hospitality
1	Insurance
1	Law
1	Mathematics
1	Science

Count	Response
2	Student
1	Occupational therapy
1	Product development
1	Consulting
4	Teaching
1	Judge
1	Management
1	Quality control
2	Research
1	Food service
1	Customer service
1	Office administration

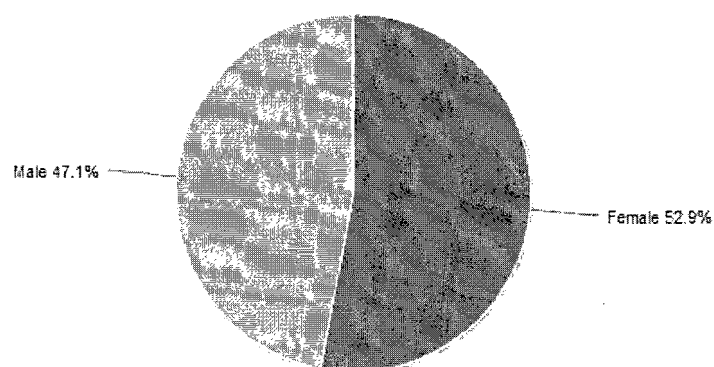
10. What are your primary work responsibilities?(e.g. administrative support, landscaping)



11. For how many years have been engaged in this work?

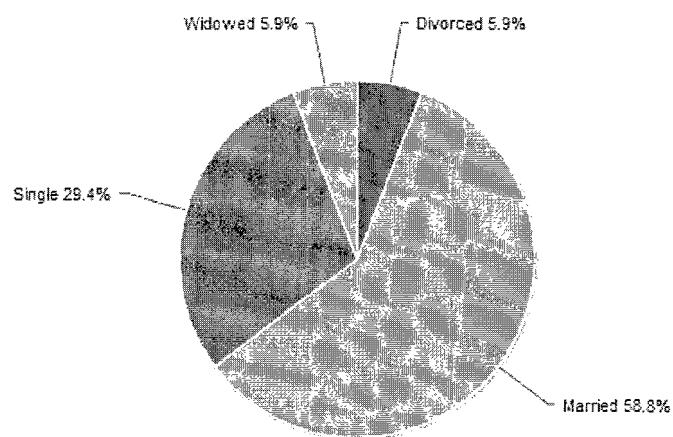
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
<1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
1-2	5	29.4%	Sum	168.0
3-5	1	5.9%	Avg.	9.9
6-10	3	17.7%	StdDev	8.1
11-20	2	11.8%	Max	20.0
20+	6	35.3%		





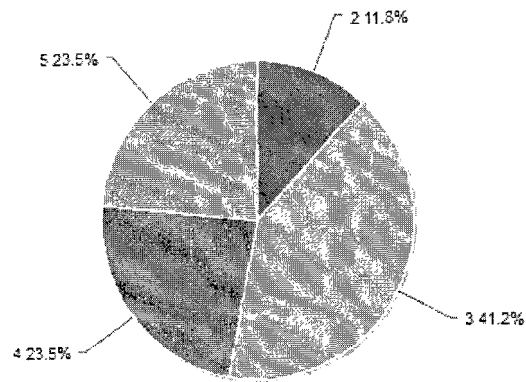
#### 4. What is your gender?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics
Female	9	52.9%	Total Responses 17
Male	8	47.1%	



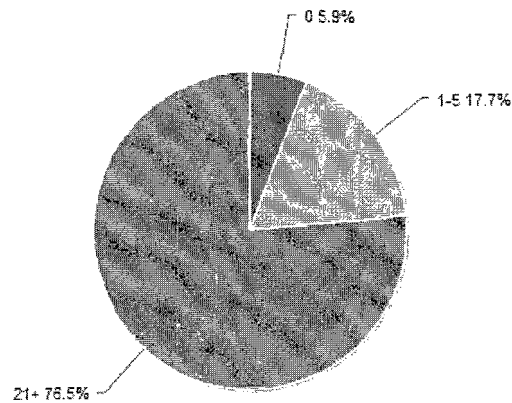
#### 5. What is your marital status?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics
Divorced	1	5.9%	Total Responses 17
Divorced - Remarried	0	0.0%	
Married	10	58.8%	
Single	5	29.4%	
Widowed	1	5.9%	
Widowed - Remarried	0	0.0%	



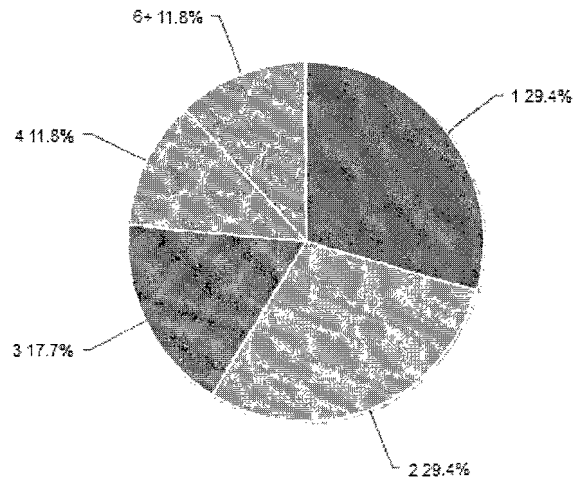
6. Where would you place yourself on the growth curve of Christian maturity?(1 - Kindergarten, 5 - Grad School)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	2	11.8%	Responses	
3	7	41.2%	Sum	61.0
4	4	23.5%	Avg.	3.6
5	4	23.5%	StdDev	1.0
			Max	5.0



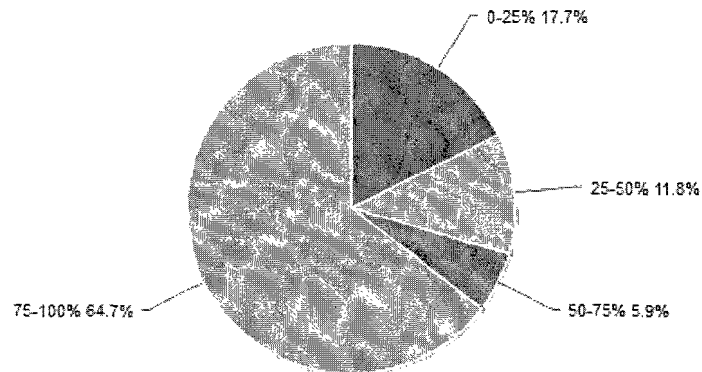
8. For how many years have you been a member or under the pastoral care of a local congregation?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0	1	5.9%	Total	17
1-5	3	17.7%	Responses	
6-10	0	0.0%	Sum	276.0
11-20	0	0.0%	Avg	16.2
21+	13	76.5%	StdDev	8.6
			Max	21.0



12. How many primary jobs have you had in the past 10 years?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	5	29.4%	Total	17
2	5	29.4%	Responses	
3	3	17.7%	Sum	44.0
4	2	11.8%	Avg.	2.6
5	0	0.0%	StdDev	1.6
6+	2	11.8%	Max	6.0



13. To what extent does your work contribute to the income generation of your family?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0-25%	3	17.7%	Total	17
25-50%	2	11.8%	Responses	
50-75%	1	5.9%	Sum	925.0
75-100%	11	64.7%	Avg.	66.1
			StdDev	17.9
			Max	75.0

7. With what frequency do you practice the following spiritual disciplines?

	less than once/month	once/month	2-3 times/month	weekly	more than once/week	Responses
a. Congregational worship	5.9% 1	0.0% 0	5.9% 1	88.2% 15	0.0% 0	17
b. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	0.0% 0	17.6% 3	23.5% 4	23.5% 4	35.3% 6	17
c. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	29.4% 5	17.6% 3	5.9% 1	35.3% 6	11.8% 2	17
d. Prayer	0.0% 0	5.9% 1	0.0% 0	5.9% 1	88.2% 15	17
e. Bible study	11.8% 2	17.6% 3	5.9% 1	5.9% 1	58.8% 10	17
f. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	23.5% 4	23.5% 4	0.0% 0	29.4% 5	23.5% 4	17
g. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	23.5% 4	11.8% 2	5.9% 1	17.6% 3	41.2% 7	17
h. Reflection (think time)	5.9% 1	5.9% 1	11.8% 2	17.6% 3	58.8% 10	17
i. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	35.3% 6	11.8% 2	17.6% 3	5.9% 1	29.4% 5	17
j. Reading (non-biblical books that have some connection with learning to know God and/or your life as a Christian)	11.8% 2	23.5% 4	23.5% 4	23.5% 4	17.6% 3	17
k. Creativity	29.4% 5	11.8% 2	0.0% 0	23.5% 4	35.3% 6	17
l. Fasting	64.7% 11	0.0% 0	11.8% 2	17.6% 3	5.9% 1	17

14. To what degree do the following statements correspond to your attitude toward your work?  
(1 - least accurate, 5 - most accurate)

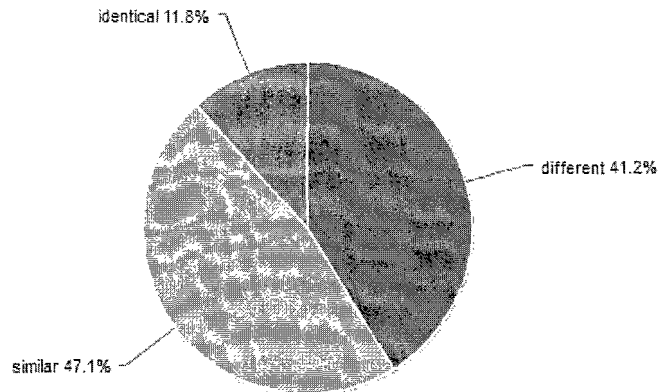
	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
I love my work	5.9%	0.0%	5.9%	47.1%	41.2%	17
	1	0	1	5	7	
My work sucks the life out of me	52.9%	17.6%	11.8%	11.8%	5.9%	17
	9	3	2	2	1	
I find my work satisfying	5.9%	0.0%	17.6%	47.1%	29.4%	17
	1	0	3	8	5	
My work feels irrelevant or unimportant	58.8%	11.8%	23.5%	5.9%	0.0%	17
	10	2	4	1	0	
I am maturing (in character/skill) through my work	5.9%	5.9%	17.6%	47.1%	23.5%	17
	1	1	3	8	4	
My work does not matter to God	82.4%	11.8%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	17
	14	2	1	0	0	
I was born to do this work	17.6%	23.5%	23.5%	17.6%	17.6%	17
	3	4	4	3	3	

## INTAKE

## EXIT

2. To what degree do the following statements correspond to your attitude toward your work?  
(1 - least accurate, 5 - most accurate)

	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
I love my work	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	41.7%	25.0%	12
	0	0	4	5	3	
My work sucks the life out of me	58.3%	25.0%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	12
	7	3	1	1	0	
I find my work satisfying	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	12
	0	0	4	4	4	
My work feels irrelevant or unimportant	50.0%	33.3%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	12
	6	4	1	1	0	
I am maturing (in character/skill) through my work	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	66.7%	25.0%	12
	0	0	1	8	3	
My work does not matter to God	75.0%	16.7%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	12
	9	2	0	1	0	
I was born to do this work	16.7%	16.7%	25.0%	33.3%	8.3%	12
	2	2	3	4	1	

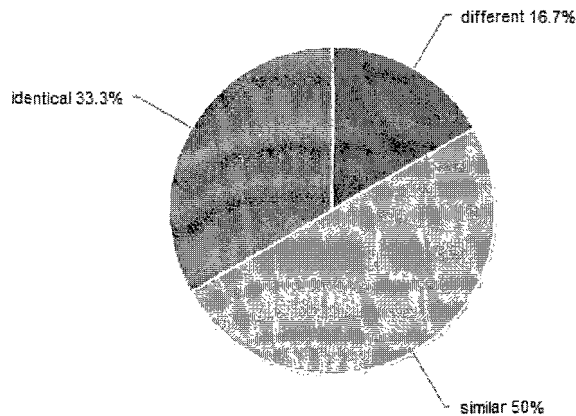


15. Based on your current understanding, how closely do you associate the general meanings of "calling" and "vocation"? They are:

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
different	7	41.2%	Total Responses	17
similar	8	47.1%		
identical	2	11.8%		

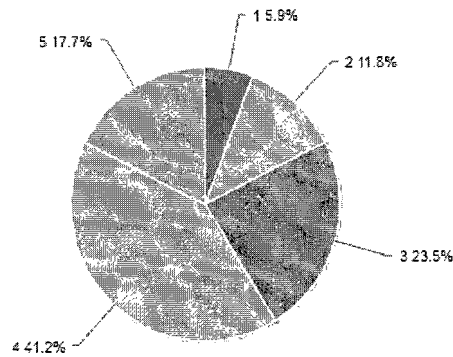
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3. Based on your current understanding, how closely do you associate the general meanings of "calling" and "vocation"? They are:

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
different	2	16.7%	Total Responses	12
similar	6	50.0%		
identical	4	33.3%		

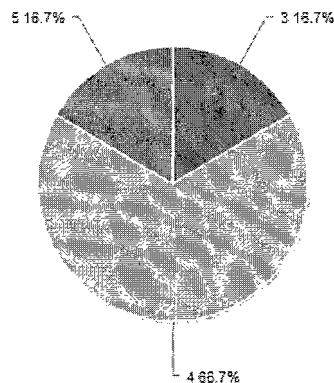


16. Based on your current understanding as a Christian disciple, how significant is it to you to have a confident understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - of no importance, 5 - imperative)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	1	5.9%	Total	17
2	2	11.8%	Responses	
3	4	23.5%	Sum	60.0
4	7	41.2%	Avg.	3.5
5	3	17.7%	StdDev	1.1
			Max	5.0

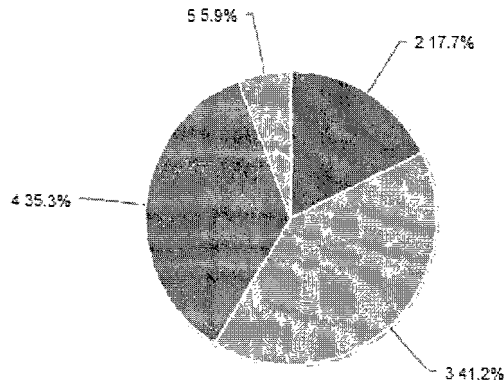
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4. Based on your current understanding as a Christian disciple, how significant is it to you to have a confident understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - of no importance, 5 - imperative)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	2	16.7%	Sum	48.0
4	8	66.7%	Avg.	4.0
5	2	16.7%	StdDev	0.6
			Max	5.0

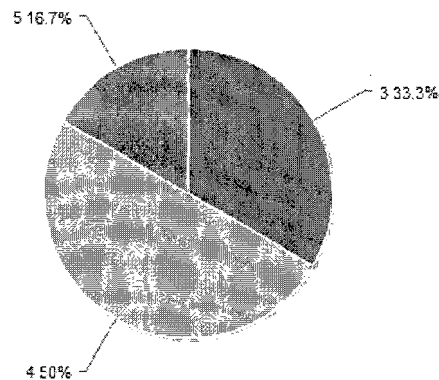


17. As a Christian disciple what is your current level of confidence of your understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - no confidence, 5 - total confidence)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
2	3	17.7%	Sum	56.0
3	7	41.2%	Avg.	3.3
4	6	35.3%	StdDev	0.8
5	1	5.9%	Max	5.0

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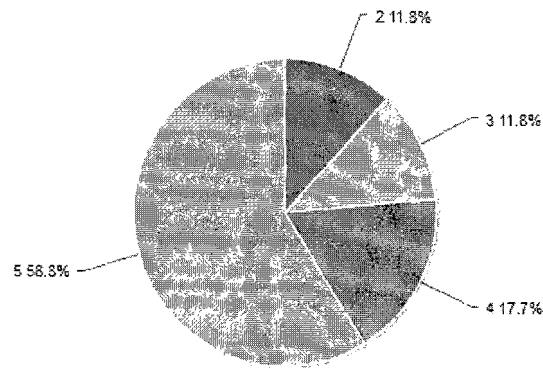
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5. As a Christian disciple what is your current level of confidence of your understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - no confidence, 5 - total confidence)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	46.0
3	4	33.3%	Avg.	3.8
4	6	50.0%	StdDev	0.7
5	2	16.7%	Max	5.0



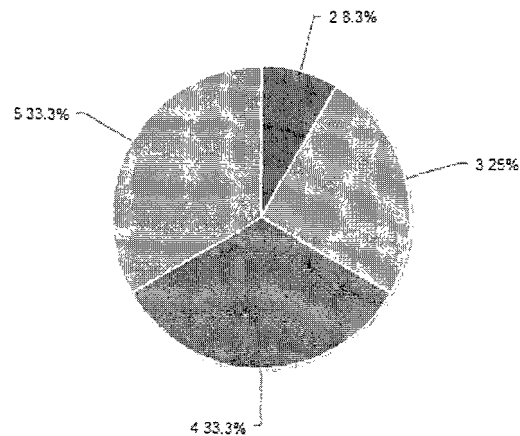


18. As you have matured as a Christian, how frequently do you think about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
2	2	11.8%	Sum	72.0
3	2	11.8%	Avg	4.2
4	3	17.7%	StdDev	1.1
5	10	58.8%	Max	5.0

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6. As you have matured as a Christian, how frequently do you think about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	1	8.3%	Sum	47.0
3	3	25.0%	Avg	3.9
4	4	33.3%	StdDev	1.0
5	4	33.3%	Max	5.0

19. Of the spiritual disciplines already listed, which ones have contributed to a clearer or more confident understanding about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (check all that apply)

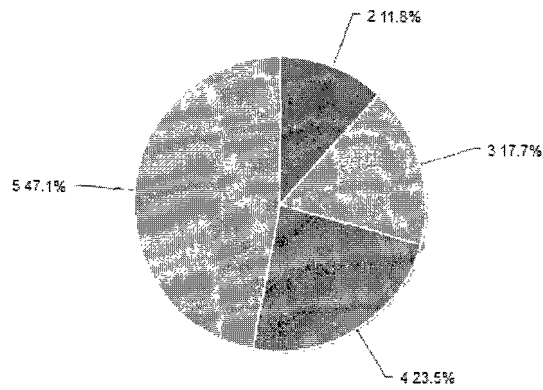
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
a. Congregational worship	7	41.2%	Total Responses	17
b. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	12	70.6%		
c. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	8	47.1%		
d. Prayer	11	64.7%		
e. Bible study	13	76.5%		
f. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	11	64.7%		
g. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	10	58.8%		
h. Reflection (think time)	16	94.1%		
i. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	7	41.2%		
j. Reading (non-biblical books with some connection with learning to know God and/or living as a Christian)	11	64.7%		
k. Creativity	3	17.7%		
l. Fasting	2	11.8%		
m. None	1	5.9%		

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7. Of the spiritual disciplines listed below, which ones have contributed to a clearer or more confident understanding about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (check all that apply)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
a. Congregational worship	5	41.7%	Total Responses	12
b. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	9	75.0%		
c. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	8	66.7%		
d. Prayer	9	75.0%		
e. Bible study	9	75.0%		
f. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	8	66.7%		
g. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	7	58.3%		
h. Reflection (think time)	10	83.3%		
i. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	3	25.0%		
j. Reading (non-biblical books with some connection with learning to know God and/or living as a Christian)	7	58.3%		
k. Creativity	3	25.0%		
l. Fasting	1	8.3%		
m. None	0	0.0%		

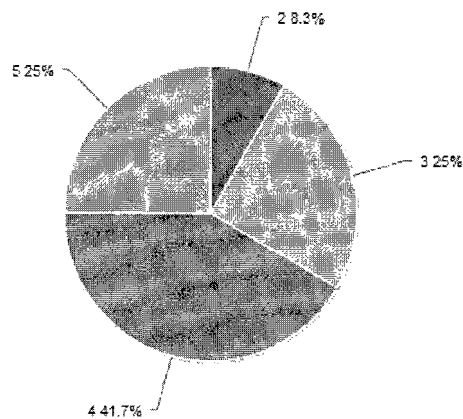


20. To what degree do you believe your work is presently connected with the rest of your life?  
(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	2	11.6%	Responses	
3	3	17.7%	Sum	69.0
4	4	23.5%	Avg.	4.1
5	8	47.1%	StdDev	1.1
			Max	5.0

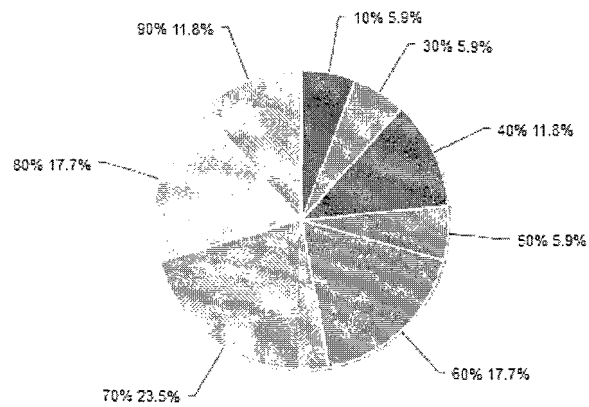
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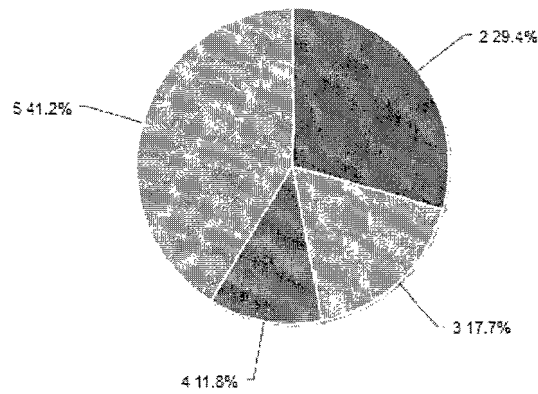
8. To what degree do you believe your work is presently connected with the rest of your life?  
(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	1	8.3%	Responses	
3	3	25.0%	Sum	46.0
4	5	41.7%	Avg.	3.8
5	3	25.0%	StdDev	0.9
			Max	5.0



21. What percentage would you estimate your work and work related activity (e.g. preparation, reflection) occupies of your whole life?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
10%	1	5.9%	Total	17
20%	0	0.0%	Responses	
30%	1	5.9%	Sum	1,050.0
40%	2	11.8%	Avg.	61.8
50%	1	5.9%	StdDev	21.2
60%	3	17.7%	Max	90.0
70%	4	23.5%		
80%	3	17.7%		
90%	2	11.8%		
100%	0	0.0%		

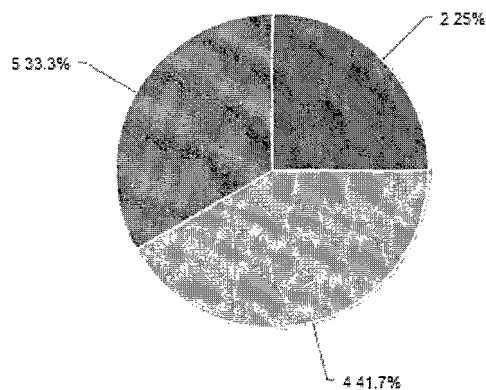


22. To what degree do you believe your work IS CURRENTLY connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
2	5	29.4%	Sum	62.0
3	3	17.7%	Avg.	3.6
4	2	11.8%	StdDev	1.3
5	7	41.2%	Max	5.0

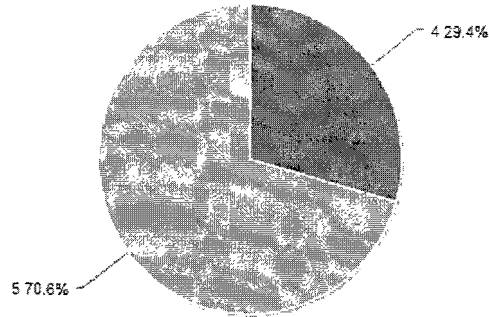
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9. To what degree do you believe your work IS CURRENTLY connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	3	25.0%	Sum	46.0
3	0	0.0%	Avg.	3.8
4	5	41.7%	StdDev	1.1
5	4	33.3%	Max	5.0

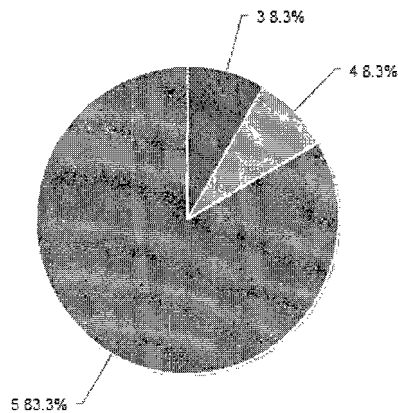


23. To what degree do you believe your work SHOULD BE connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	0	0.0%	Sum	80.0
4	5	29.4%	Avg.	4.7
5	12	70.6%	StdDev	0.5
			Max	5.0

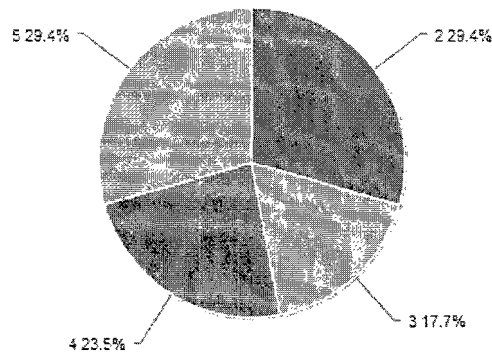
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10. To what degree do you believe your work SHOULD BE connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	1	8.3%	Sum	57.0
4	1	8.3%	Avg.	4.8
5	10	83.3%	StdDev	0.6
			Max	5.0

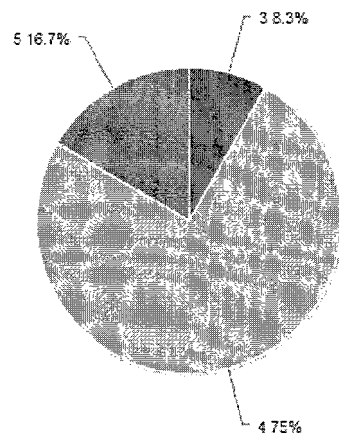


24. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's ongoing sustaining of Creation?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
2	5	29.4%	Sum	60.0
3	3	17.7%	Avg.	3.5
4	4	23.5%	StdDev	1.2
5	5	29.4%	Max	5.0

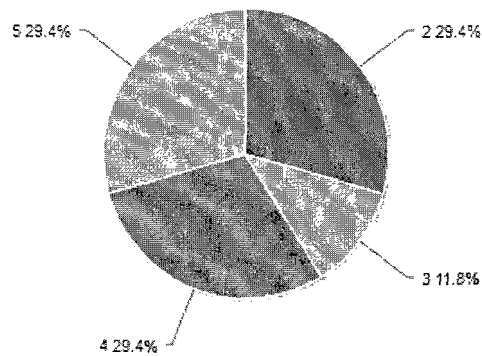
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11. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's ongoing sustaining of Creation?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	49.0
3	1	8.3%	Avg.	4.1
4	9	75.0%	StdDev	0.5
5	2	16.7%	Max	5.0

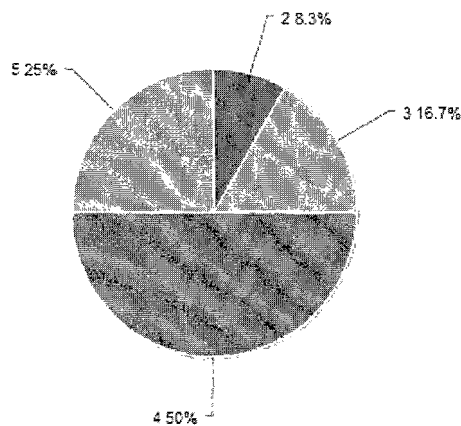


25. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's gracious work of restraining evil and corruption in the world?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	5	29.4%	Responses	
3	2	11.8%	Sum	61.0
4	5	29.4%	Avg.	3.6
5	5	29.4%	StdDev	1.2
			Max	5.0

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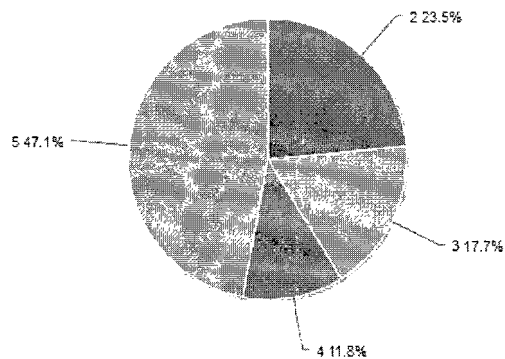
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12. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's gracious work of restraining evil and corruption in the world?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	1	8.3%	Responses	
3	2	16.7%	Sum	47.0
4	6	50.0%	Avg.	3.9
5	3	25.0%	StdDev	0.9
			Max	5.0





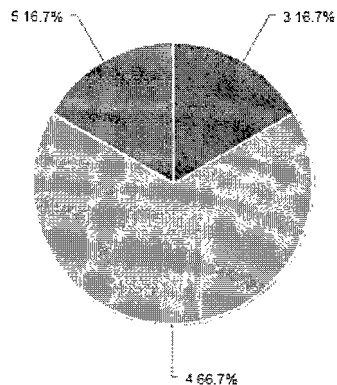
26. To what degree do you believe that your work is a participation in the kingdom and/or mission of God?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	4	23.5%	Responses	
3	3	17.7%	Sum	65.0
4	2	11.8%	Avg	3.8
5	8	47.1%	StdDev	1.2
			Max	5.0

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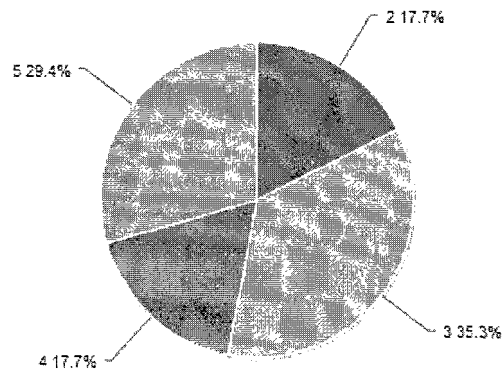
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13. To what degree do you believe that your work is a participation in the kingdom and/or mission of God?(1 - never, 5 - always)



13. To what degree do you believe that your work is a participation in the kingdom and/or mission of God?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	2	16.7%	Sum	48.0
4	8	66.7%	Avg	4.0
5	2	16.7%	StdDev	0.8
			Max	5.0

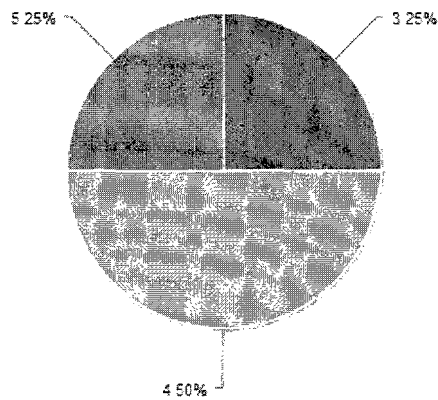


27. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's work to renew and redeem (transform) all things?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	17
2	3	17.7%	Sum	61.0
3	6	35.3%	Avg.	3.6
4	3	17.7%	StdDev	1.1
5	5	29.4%	Max	5.0

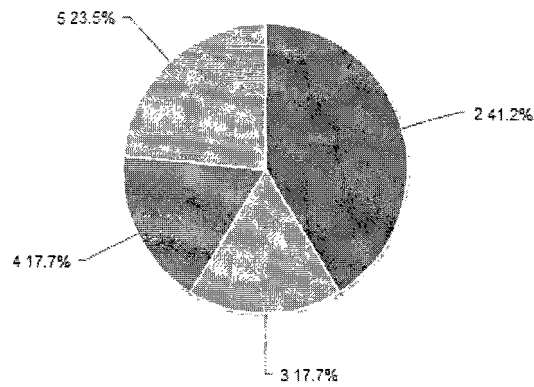
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14. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's work to renew and redeem (transform) all things?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	48.0
3	3	25.0%	Avg.	4.0
4	6	50.0%	StdDev	0.7
5	3	25.0%	Max	5.0

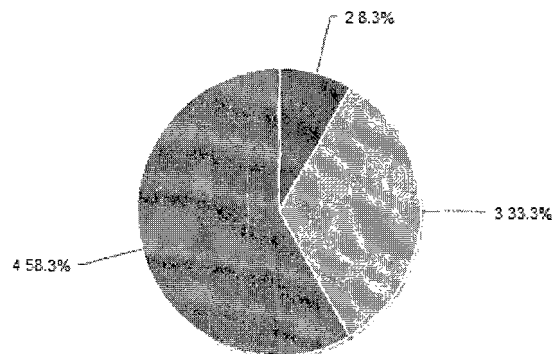


28. To what degree do you believe that your work is bringing hope or a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth promised at Christ's return?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	17
2	7	41.2%	Responses	
3	3	17.7%	Sum	55.0
4	3	17.7%	Avg.	3.2
5	4	23.5%	StdDev	1.2
			Max	5.0

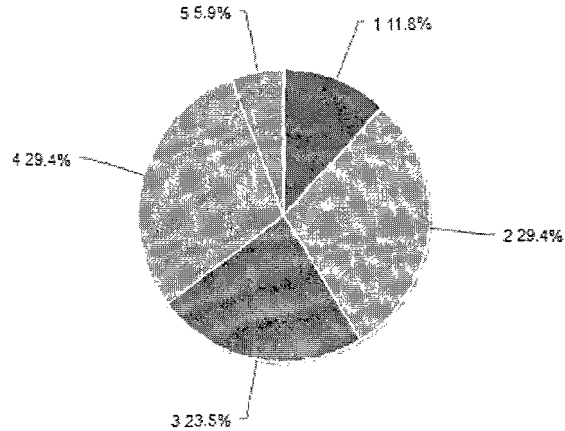
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15. To what degree do you believe that your work is bringing hope or a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth promised at Christ's return?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	1	8.3%	Responses	
3	4	33.3%	Sum	42.0
4	7	58.3%	Avg.	3.5
5	0	0.0%	StdDev	0.6
			Max	4.0

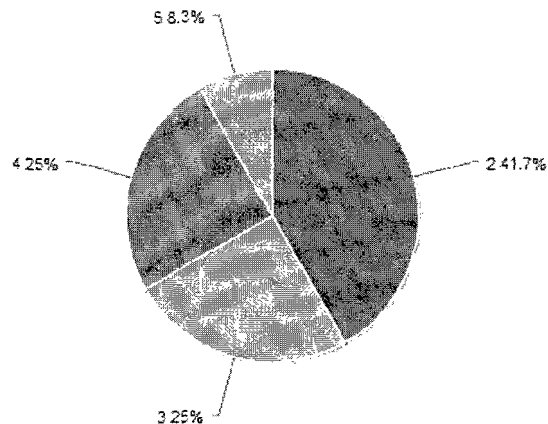


29. How frequently do you experience a sense of conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ?(1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	2	11.8%	Total Responses	17
2	5	29.4%	Sum	49.0
3	4	23.5%	Avg.	2.9
4	5	29.4%	StdDev	1.1
5	1	5.9%	Max	5.0

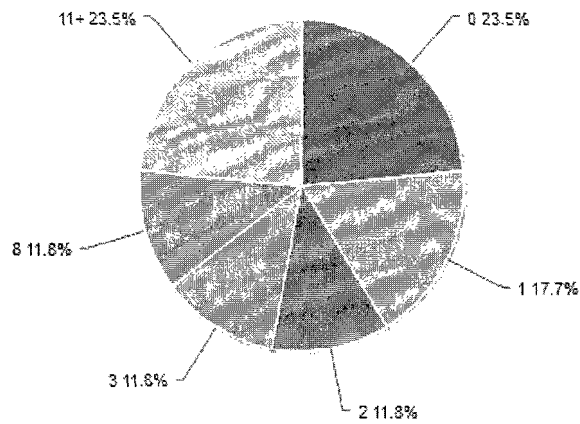
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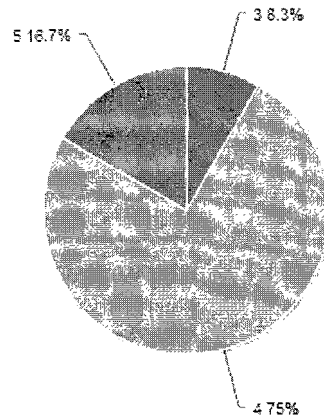
16. How frequently do you experience a sense of conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ?(1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	5	41.7%	Sum	36.0
3	3	25.0%	Avg.	3.0
4	3	25.0%	StdDev	1.0
5	1	8.3%	Max	5.0



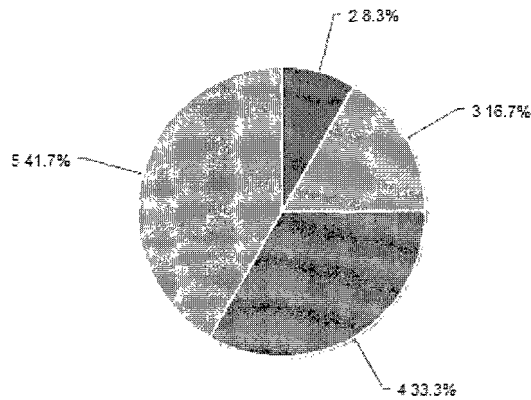
30. How many other Christians do you know in your local community who are engaged in work that is similar to yours?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0	4	23.5%	Total	17
1	3	17.7%	Responses	
2	2	11.8%	Sum	73.0
3	2	11.8%	Avg.	4.3
4	0	0.0%	StdDev	4.4
5	0	0.0%	Max	11.0
6	0	0.0%		
7	0	0.0%		
8	2	11.8%		
9	0	0.0%		
10	0	0.0%		
11+	4	23.5%		



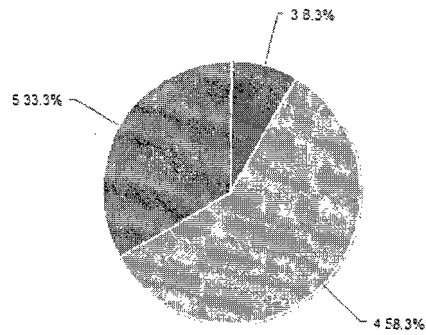
18. How well do you think you understand the concept of calling as the practice of "faithful presence" as it was presented in the FWF? (1 - not at all, 5 - very well)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	1	8.3%	Sum	49.0
4	9	75.0%	Avg.	4.1
5	2	16.7%	StdDev	0.5
			Max	5.0



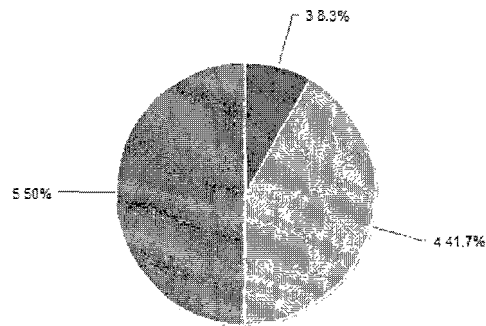
19. How convinced are you that "faithful presence" (as presented in the FWF) expresses a wise and biblical understanding of Christian calling? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	1	8.3%	Responses	
3	2	16.7%	Sum	49.0
4	4	33.3%	Avg.	4.1
5	5	41.7%	StdDev	1.0
			Max	5.0



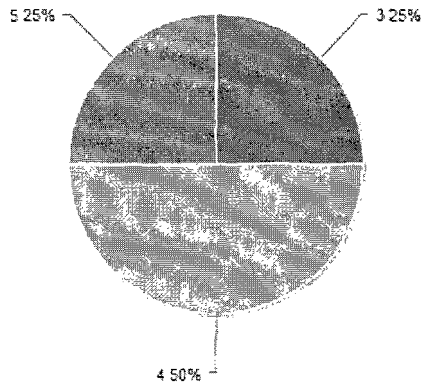
20. How well do you understand this statement: "Practicing Faithful Presence means that our work calls us to worship in every area of life because we live in the presence of God"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	1	8.3%	Sum	51.0
4	7	58.3%	Avg.	4.3
5	4	33.3%	StdDev	0.6
			Max	5.0



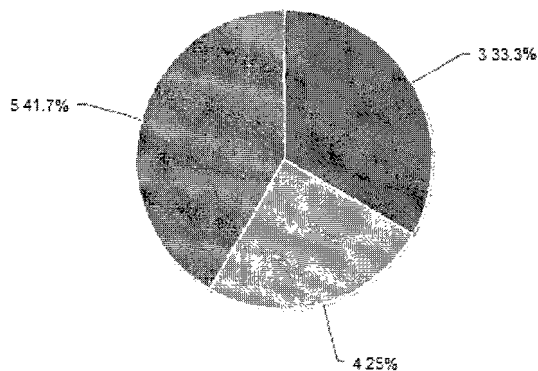
21. How well do you understand this statement: "Practicing Faithful Presence means that our work calls us to love by being present in the lives of people with whom our work engages us"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total	12
2	0	0.0%	Responses	
3	1	8.3%	Sum	53.0
4	5	41.7%	Avg.	4.4
5	6	50.0%	StdDev	0.6
			Max	5.0



22. How well do you understand how to apply this statement: "Practicing Faithful Presence means that our work calls us to worship in every area of life because we live in the presence of God"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

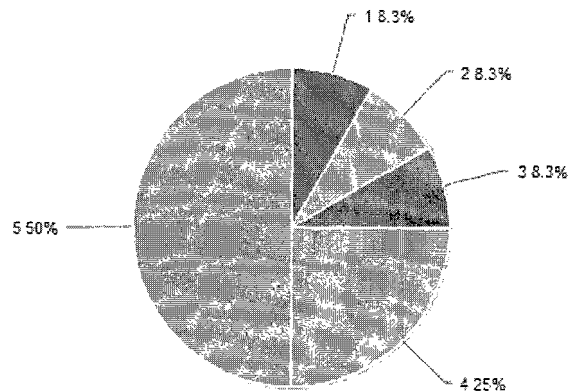
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	48.0
3	3	25.0%	Avg.	4.0
4	8	50.0%	StdDev	0.7
5	3	25.0%	Max	5.0



23. How well do you understand how to apply this statement: "Practicing Faithful Presence means that our work calls us to love by being present in the lives of other people"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

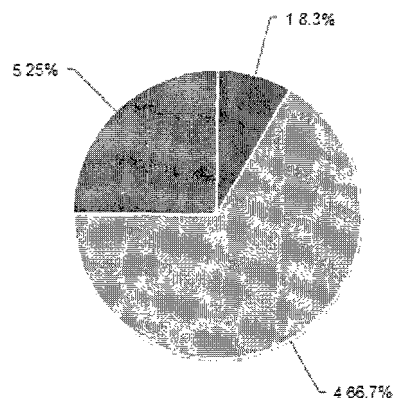
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	49.0
3	4	33.3%	Avg.	4.1
4	3	25.0%	StdDev	0.9
5	5	41.7%	Max	5.0





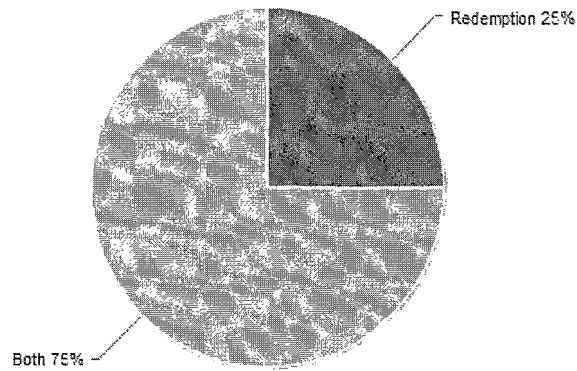
24. To what degree do you agree with this statement: "Redemption brings Creation to completion"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	1	8.3%	Total Responses	12
2	1	8.3%	Sum	48.0
3	1	8.3%	Avg.	4.0
4	3	25.0%	StdDev	1.3
5	6	50.0%	Max	5.0



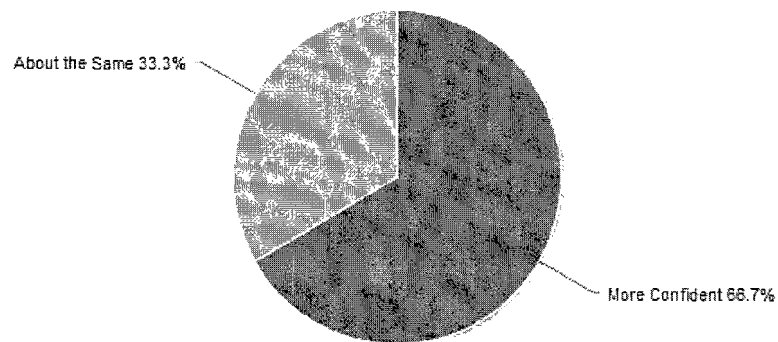
25. Based on the presentation of "faithful presence" in the FWF, to what degree are you convinced that work means more than vocation? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	1	8.3%	Total Responses	12
2	0	0.0%	Sum	48.0
3	0	0.0%	Avg.	4.0
4	8	66.7%	StdDev	1.0
5	3	25.0%	Max	5.0



26. Is the Mission of God primarily about:

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Creation	0	0.0%	Total Responses	12
Redemption	3	25.0%		
Both	9	75.0%		



27. [Refer to the previous question] After completing the FWF, how would describe your understanding of the Mission of God?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
More Confident	8	66.7%	Total Responses	12
Less Confident	0	0.0%		
About the Same	4	33.3%		

28. To what degree have the following questions (which we asked devotionally at the beginning of each session) changed the way you engage in your work or appreciate the relationship between faith and work? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
In what ways have you found joy in your work?	16.7% 2	25.0% 3	16.7% 2	33.3% 4	8.3% 1	12
In what ways have you cried out for help in your work?	16.7% 2	25.0% 3	16.7% 2	25.0% 3	16.7% 2	12
In what ways have you seen your work contribute to the flourishing of other people and the creation?	8.3% 1	8.3% 1	41.7% 5	33.3% 4	8.3% 1	12
In what ways have you seen your work push back against evil, sin, and brokenness?	8.3% 1	25.0% 3	33.3% 4	25.0% 3	8.3% 1	12
In what ways have you seen your work point to the hope of redemption that is ultimately found in Christ's work?	8.3% 1	16.7% 2	41.7% 5	25.0% 3	8.3% 1	12

29. To what degree would you agree that the following elements of congregational church life are effective in encouraging and equipping you to practice "faithful presence"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
The congregation should have a clear statement of purpose that explains how serving the mission of God in the local community includes work in every area of culture.	0.0% 0	8.3% 1	25.0% 3	33.3% 4	33.3% 4	12
Sermons should regularly address and apply biblical wisdom and direction to work and the practice of faithful presence.	0.0% 0	8.3% 1	16.7% 2	25.0% 3	50.0% 6	12
Regular instruction should teach biblical ideas of calling and faithful presence and wrestle with the real life conflicts of faith and work.	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	8.3% 1	16.7% 2	75.0% 9	12
Congregational prayer should include the public intercession, blessing, and celebration of work and the mission of God being furthered by the practice of faithful presence.	0.0% 0	8.3% 1	16.7% 2	16.7% 2	58.3% 7	12
Weekly celebration of the Eucharist (Lord's Supper, Communion) should emphasize God's presence, power, and purpose in our work and in our participation in the mission of God.	0.0% 0	16.7% 2	25.0% 3	16.7% 2	41.7% 5	12
Honoring sabbath should resist the pull of idolatry and indifference/injustice as it sets a rhythm in Creation and Redemption.	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	33.3% 4	41.7% 5	25.0% 3	12
Discipleship should include work-related mentoring that stimulates professional collegiality, personal camaraderie, and redemptive vision-casting.	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	16.7% 2	16.7% 2	66.7% 8	12

30. What would improve this course of study were I to offer it again?

Count	Response
1	Too much information for the time allowed
1	All the information was good, so hard to fit more into the time, but we need shift towards the lab, the living, the discussing, the working out, praying for each other.
1	I think preparation reading/questions and fuller discussion could help participants engage with the material. Obviously this would require the material to be spread out over more weeks and require a larger time commitment, but I think the value is worth it :)
1	I found the slideshow format hard to follow, but the lecture that went along with it, or even separate from it, was much more helpful. This may be just me, of course!
1	Explore ways or add time to get us to share our powerful stories. How can we share our struggles and get empathy, prayer, and help?
1	It seemed we jumped from very big-picture conversations regarding calling and vocation, straight into applications that seemed to deal with smaller issues of how to be a "good" employee. In my thinking, we seemed to skip/skim over questions regarding our actual vision for what types of vocations we as Christians "should" be involved in. For example, some branches of Christianity have historically said that being involved in war (i.e., being in the military) is wrong. What do we think about that? Should the Christian engineer seek to choose (within the available options) a job that deals more/less directly with people and the applications of engineering skills to humanitarian issues? Is it true that the "most Christian" way to be an engineer is to go design/build wells in west Africa, or is it okay to do theoretical work hidden in an ivory tower somewhere in posh North America? What do we think about the "preferential option for the poor?" etc. etc. These are challenging issues, especially for those of us who have already settled in a career/job somewhere, but it seems these need to be dealt with if the Church is truly to live out a vision of New Creation that is in any way unique from secular society.
1	I would do it every week instead of every other. It seemed rushed, there is quite a bit of content covered in a short period of time. I would have loved to have had more dialogue and discussion of how to determine what work we were created to do and how to help individuals find God's purpose for their work.
1	Condensing the material presented over the first four weeks and expanding upon the material presented at the last two. It depends upon the foundation that the class participants bring, but it would have been exciting to continue to unpack and explore FP ideas. Some additional reading materials would have been interesting.
1	Some of the material presented (biblical connection between work and faith) could be more concise.
1	More scriptural reference and application. You place too much credence on the quotes and wisdom of thought leaders. These need to be contextual to Scripture.

### 31. What aspects of the course did you find most helpful?

Count	Response
1	Discussion time and sharing about our work
1	The concept of faithful presence.
1	The sense that G-d cares about my work. I have never heard that in church.
1	question-answer times. More time for discussion sometimes would have been great.
1	I really appreciated the devotional questions about work which I could reflect on throughout the week. Also I enjoyed the diverse community of ages, professions, etc. discussing the same material. Additionally the tangible material/readings will be helpful in moving forward and trying to apply these ideas more fully.
1	Teaching about the redemptive value of our work/biblical connection between work and the Kingdom. Questions about how we are fighting evil, bringing the Kingdom, etc.
1	I appreciated the balance between instruction and conversation. I found it helpful to get other people's take on the matter
1	Being in the presence of believers discussing work was in of itself a blessing. Steve's repeated emphasis that my work did have value in God's eyes and in the church was a balm compared to what I have heard in church all these years.
1	The biblical base and references for the course and having that material to review and use for further study.
1	Concrete examples of how the view of vocation you advocated led to different places than other ways of viewing work.
1	Emphasis on "Opus Dei" and how that transcends denominations: our calling and our vocation are linked and God uses all work to transform the world.

### 32. What aspects of the course did you find least helpful

Count	Response
1	Organization of the slides was confusing initially. I think this has already been changed.
1	Slides and handouts could be condensed quite a lot, and organized to be a bit clearer.
1	The Halloween candy - that wasn't good for my health, but I'll forgive you!
1	The handouts were not numbered.
1	The powerpoints
1	The two dimensional graphics were confusing
1	a lot of lecturing
1	Moving from the first class to the last, Steve became more skillful at presenting material, providing things ahead of class, so that there was time for good discussion.
1	I felt like we were always rushed. Perhaps more time/more sessions would allow for a better pace from which to explore the material.
1	Some redundancy in each session which seemed to slow the process of learning and development of thoughts
1	I would have appreciated more structure with the material in the notebook. In other words, to have it divided from week to week with regards to reading and correlating with the powerpoint slides used during the sessions.

33. Please feel free to add any comments, observations, or recommendations.

Count	Response
1	Thanks for all your work on this topic!
1	thank you
1	There have been many times when I have worked for money and not because I was "called" to do the work. I feel like we are called to God, He provides, and we are to serve the people God puts in our paths. The content seemed very centered on a middle/upper class perspective and maybe that is your target group. It seems that you would need to rethink how it was presented with a less educated more blue collar group.
1	While I really appreciated the diversity of our group, I could imagine this material would be very powerful in a smaller group. The time to discuss and interpret could be more easily facilitated with less people. Overall I thought it was a great "short course" type of series to engage the challenges of faithful presence and to be reminded that our work is all to God's glory. Thank you!
1	I think Congregational Prayer is a big area for improvement in equipping Christians to practice faithful presence. It seems very foreign to most Christians, but if we could just get past the fact that we are not used to it and pray in general for peoples' work, it would both drive home the responsibility that we each have to each other and society in our work, and create an outlet for our need to pray for our work and be supported by each other. <i>The latter is important especially because specific prayer requests relating to our work are often inappropriate or unethical to share in a public setting like a church.</i>
1	Thank you for this important study. Best wishes in your final disertation. Gos bless you Renee Qamar
1	It would be interesting to see a "testimony" time in church services where individuals from the congregation would share about how they are trying to practice faithful presence. Not necessarily teach 'how to' but just sharing what they're doing. Overtime it might encourage more the congregation to think more creatively/more deeply practice this idea



## **APPENDIX D**

### **FAITH AND WORK GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS**



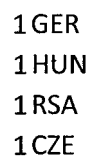
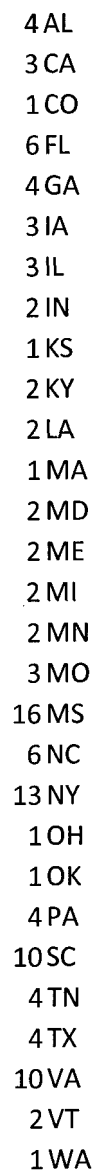
Survey: Faith & Work survey

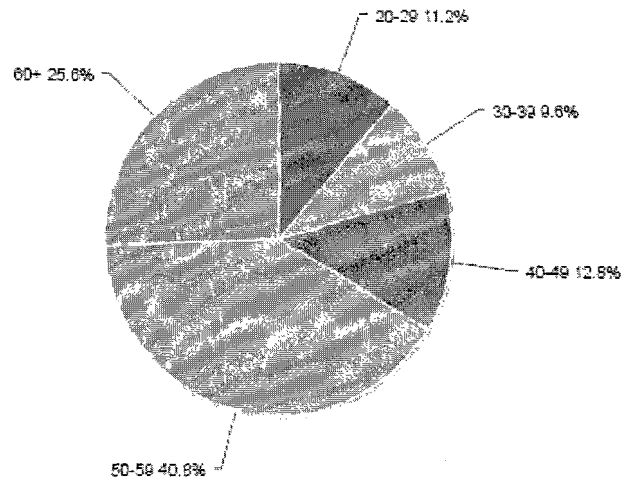
Thank you for your willingness to help me with the research portion of my Doctor of Ministry dissertation/project. Your completing this survey will give me a clearer understanding of how Christians view the relationship of work and the Christian faith. The goal of my dissertation/project is to recommend ways that local congregations can equip and encourage Christians to understand the biblical ideas of calling, vocation, and mission, and to practice (in the words of James Davison Hunter) "faithful presence" in the world.

Keep in mind that "work" means more than a job. Work has in mind the ways we intentionally invest ourselves in our lives whether or not this work is income-producing or career-oriented.

If you would like to see the results of this survey, drop me an email at FaithWork Forum@gmail.com. When the results are compiled, I plan to post a link where you can view those results.

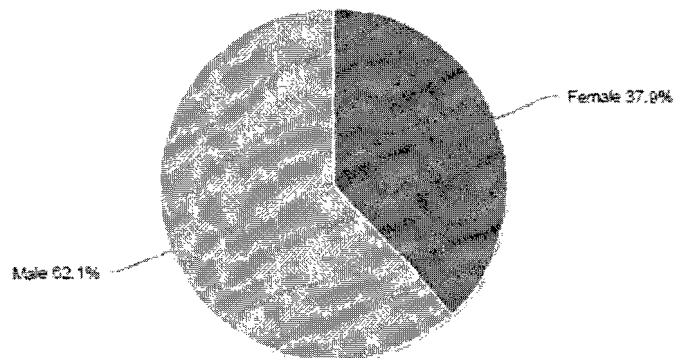
My thanks to Amy Sherman (Ph.D.; Senior Fellow, Sagamore Institute Faith in Communities) for questions adapted from resources created by the Vocation Infusion Learning Community (c) 2011 by Amy L. Sherman. Reprinted with permission from the author. For more resources, visit [www.vocationalstewardship.org](http://www.vocationalstewardship.org).





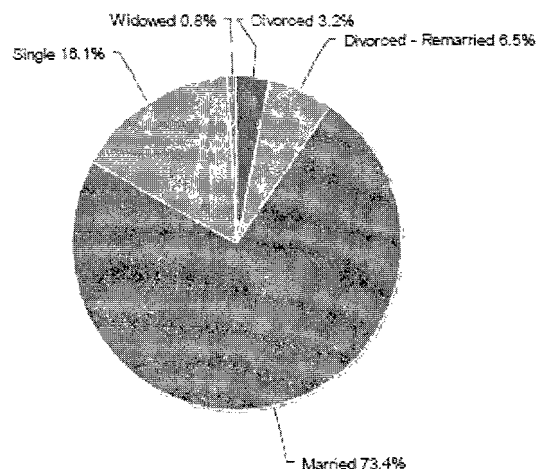
## 2. What is your age?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
20-29	14	11.2%	Total Responses	125
30-39	12	9.6%	Sum	5,750.0
40-49	16	12.8%	Avg.	46.0
50-59	51	40.8%	StdDev	12.7
60+	32	25.6%	Max	60.0



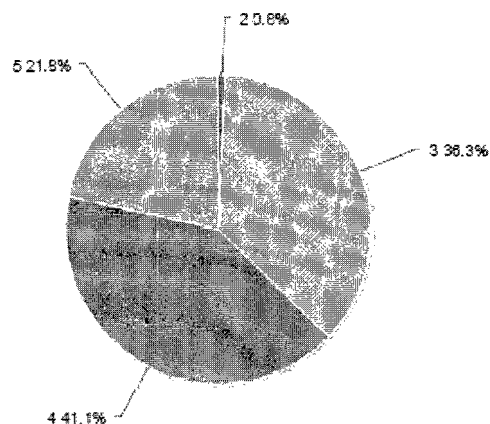
## 3. What is your gender

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Female	47	37.9%	Total Responses	124
Male	77	62.1%		



#### 4. What is your marital status?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Divorced	4	3.2%	Total Responses	124
Divorced - Remarried	8	6.5%		
Married	91	73.4%		
Single	20	16.1%		
Widowed	1	0.8%		
Widowed - Remarried	0	0.0%		

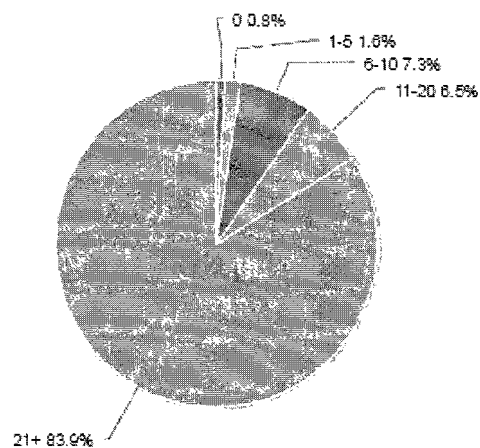


#### 5. Where would you place yourself on the growth curve of Christian maturity?(1 - Kindergarten, 5 - Grad School)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	1	0.8%		
3	45	36.3%	Sum	476.0
4	51	41.1%	Avg.	3.8
5	27	21.8%	StdDev	0.8
			Max	5.0

6. With what frequency do you practice the following spiritual disciplines?

	less than once/month	once/month	2-3 times/month	weekly	more than once/week	Responses
a. Congregational worship	3.2% 4	0.8% 1	10.5% 13	75.0% 93	10.5% 13	124
b. Eucharist (Lord's Supper, Communion)	22.6% 28	49.2% 61	8.9% 11	18.5% 23	0.8% 1	124
c. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	6.5% 8	8.9% 11	19.5% 24	41.5% 51	23.6% 29	123
d. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	27.6% 34	10.6% 13	18.7% 23	39.0% 48	4.1% 5	123
e. Private prayer	1.6% 2	0.8% 1	4.0% 5	41.1% 51	52.4% 65	124
f. Personal Bible study	5.6% 7	6.5% 8	8.9% 11	35.5% 44	43.5% 54	124
g. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	20.2% 25	20.2% 25	30.6% 38	17.7% 22	11.3% 14	124
h. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	16.9% 21	17.7% 22	21.0% 26	27.4% 34	16.9% 21	124
i. Reflection (think time)	0.8% 1	4.0% 5	15.3% 19	40.3% 50	39.5% 49	124
j. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	42.7% 53	10.5% 13	15.3% 19	19.4% 24	12.1% 15	124
k. Reading (books other than the Bible that have some connection with learning to know God and/or your life as a Christian)	12.1% 15	12.1% 15	12.1% 15	37.9% 47	25.8% 32	124
l. Creativity	25.0% 31	20.2% 25	19.4% 24	19.4% 24	16.1% 20	124
m. Fasting	91.9% 113	4.1% 5	1.6% 2	2.4% 3	0.0% 0	123



7. For how many years have you been a member or under the pastoral care of a local congregation?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0	1	0.8%	Total Responses	124
1-5	2	1.6%	Sum	2,328.0
6-10	9	7.3%	Avg.	18.8
11-20	8	6.5%	StdDev	5.3
21+	104	83.9%	Max	21.0

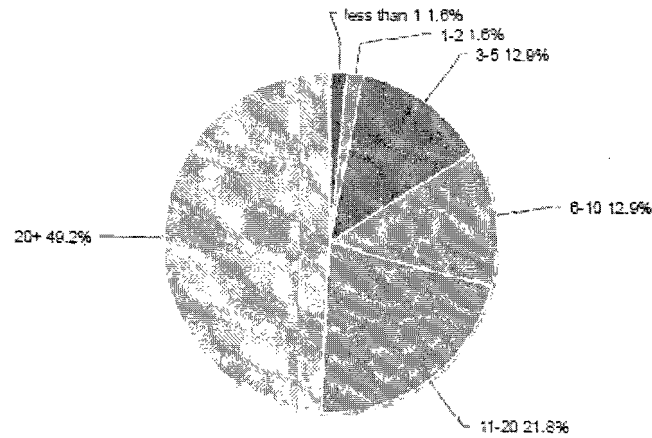
8. What is your primary area of employment?(e.g. education, horticulture).Note: For the purpose of this survey think of work as a category bigger than employment or vocation. Think of work as an area of your life in which you make an intentional prioritized investment. Thus, your work can include your role as a spouse or parent, your focused involvement with your church or community, etc. Almost certainly, unless you are unemployed, your vocation will be the largest single category of work in your life.

Education - Teaching	36
Religious Organization	22
Finance	11
Health Care	9
Other	6
Information Technology	5
Management	4
Legal	4
Sales	3
Media - Journalism - Newspaper	3
Transportation	2
Student	2
Human Resources	2
Design	2
Admin & Clerical	2
Accounting	2
Social Services	1
Retired	1
Research	1
Real Estate	1
Nonprofit - Social Services	1
Insurance	1
General Business	1
Engineering	1



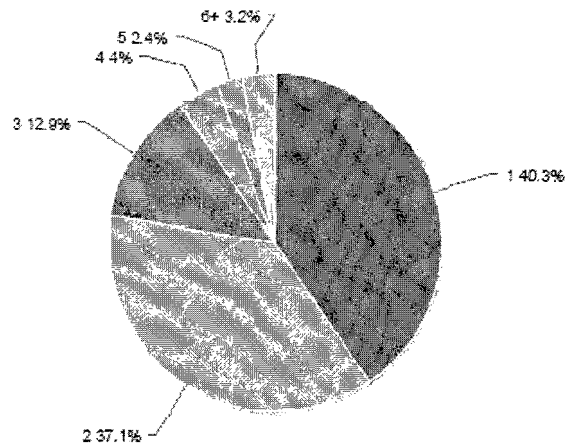
9. What are your primary vocational responsibilities?(e.g. administrative support, landscaping)

Education	39
Ministerial Service	26
Administration	12
Finance	12
Medicine/Health Care	10
Research	9
Homemaking	8
Management	7
Sales	6
Software/Information Technology	5
Writing	5
Legal	4
Music	4
Design	3
Retired	3
Transportation	2
Admin & Clerical	2
Case Management	2
Student	2
Agriculture	2
Communications	2
Accounting	2
Human Resource	2
Real Estate	1
Customer Service	1
Volunteering	1
Business	1
Insurance	1
Engineering	1
Development	1
Nonprofit	1



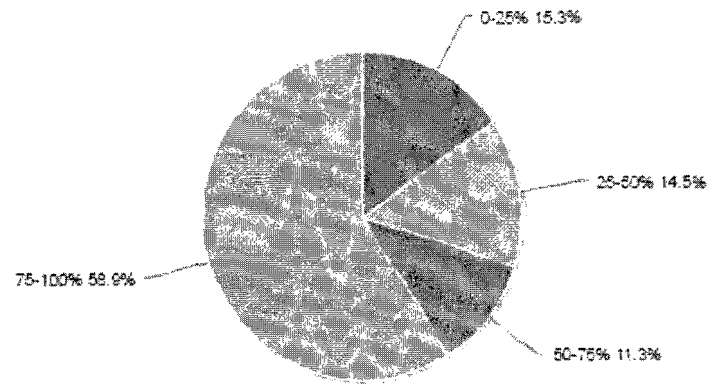
**10. For how many years have been engaged in this vocation?**

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
less than 1	2	1.6%	Total Responses	124
1-2	2	1.6%	Sum	1,663.0
3-5	16	12.9%	Avg.	13.6
6-10	16	12.9%	StdDev	6.8
11-20	27	21.8%	Max	20.0
20+	61	49.2%		



**11. How many primary jobs have you had in the past 10 years?**

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	50	40.3%	Total Responses	124
2	46	37.1%	Sum	249.0
3	16	12.9%	Avg.	2.0
4	5	4.0%	StdDev	1.2
5	3	2.4%	Max	6.0
6+	4	3.2%		

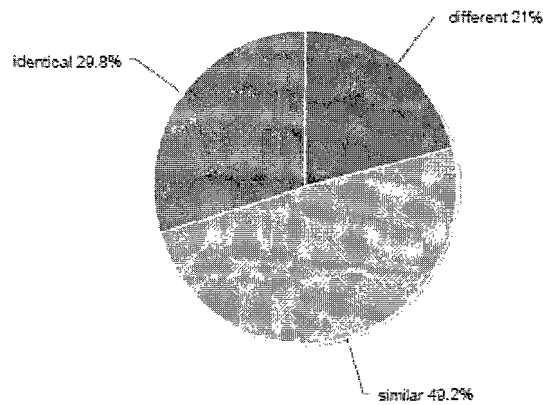


**12. To what extend does your work contribute to the income generation of your family?**

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0-25%	19	15.3%	Total	124
25-50%	18	14.5%	Responses	
50-75%	14	11.3%	Sum	6,625.0
75-100%	73	58.9%	Avg.	63.1
			StdDev	19.2
			Max	75.0

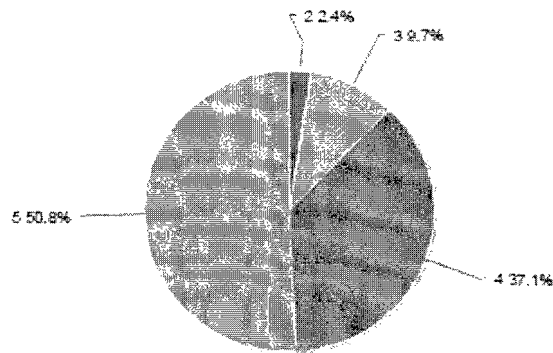
13. To what degree do the following statements correspond to your attitude toward your vocation? (1 - least accurate, 5 - most accurate)

	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
I was born to do this work	3.2% 4	10.5% 13	13.7% 17	26.6% 33	46.0% 57	124
My work sucks the life out of me	50.0% 62	24.2% 30	18.5% 23	4.0% 5	3.2% 4	124
I find my work satisfying	0.8% 1	4.8% 6	12.1% 15	37.1% 46	45.2% 56	124
My work feels irrelevant or unimportant	77.4% 96	10.5% 13	7.3% 9	4.0% 5	0.8% 1	124
I am maturing (in character/skill) through my work	2.4% 3	0.8% 1	11.3% 14	31.5% 39	54.0% 67	124
My work is what I have to do to pay the bills	39.5% 49	18.5% 23	20.2% 25	12.1% 15	9.7% 12	124
My work matters to God	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	4.0% 5	12.1% 15	83.9% 104	124
My work doesn't feel spiritual	50.8% 63	24.2% 30	12.9% 16	9.7% 12	2.4% 3	124
I take pride in my work	0.8% 1	0.8% 1	5.6% 7	34.7% 43	58.1% 72	124
Work relationships are nuisance	62.1% 77	19.4% 24	12.9% 16	2.4% 3	3.2% 4	124
My work makes me a part of serving the common good	0.8% 1	4.0% 5	8.1% 10	21.8% 27	65.3% 81	124



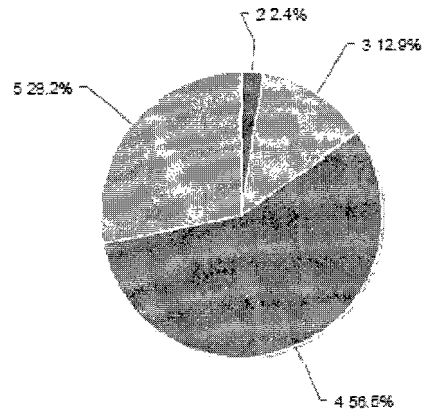
14. Based on your current understanding, how closely do you associate the general meanings of "calling" and "vocation"? They are:

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
different	26	21.0%	Total Responses	124
similar	61	49.2%		
identical	37	29.8%		



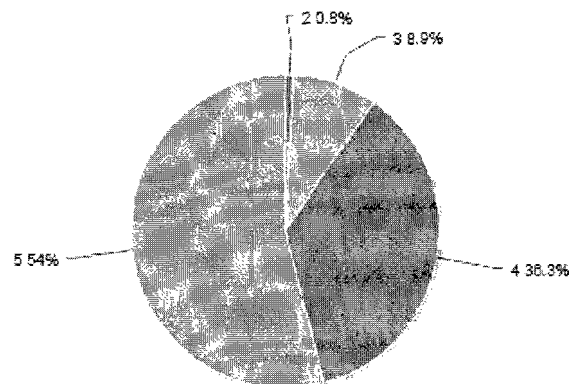
15. Based on your current understanding as a Christian disciple, how important do you believe it is to have a confident understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - of no impor-

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	3	2.4%	Sum	541.0
3	12	9.7%	Avg.	4.4
4	46	37.1%	StdDev	0.8
5	63	50.8%	Max	5.0



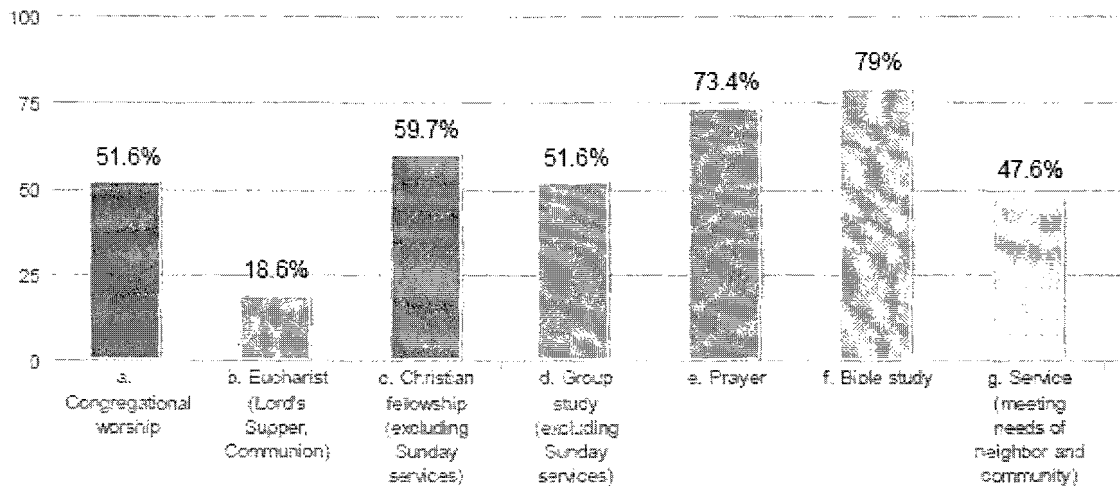
16. As a Christian disciple what is your current level of confidence of your understanding of what "calling" and/or "vocation" mean? (1 - no confidence, 5 - total confidence)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	3	2.4%	Sum	509.0
3	16	12.9%	Avg.	4.1
4	70	56.5%	StdDev	0.7
5	35	28.2%	Max	5.0



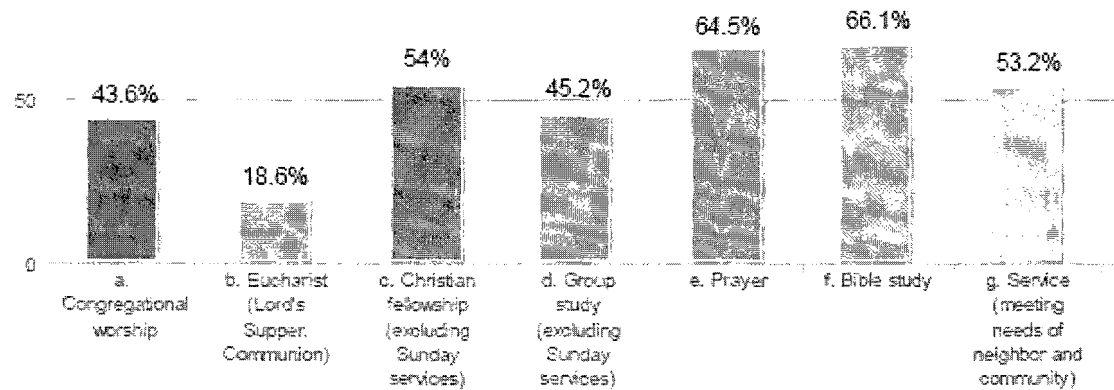
17. As you have matured as a Christian, how frequently do you think about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	1	0.8%	Sum	550.0
3	11	8.9%	Avg.	4.4
4	45	36.3%	StdDev	0.7
5	67	54.0%	Max	5.0



**18. Of the spiritual disciplines already listed, which ones have contributed to a clearer or more confident UNDERSTANDING about the relationship of your work and your Christian faith? (check all that apply)**

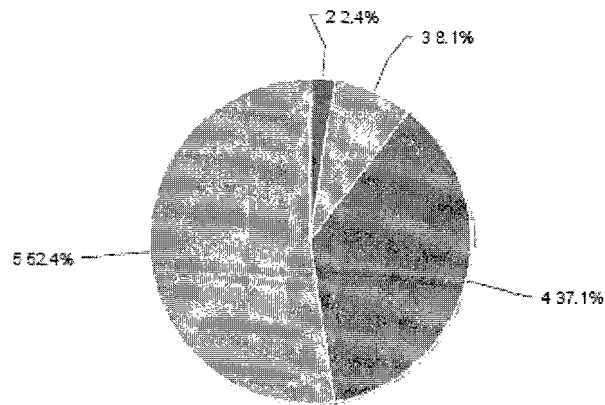
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
a. Congregational worship	64	51.6%	Total	124
b. Eucharist (Lord's Supper, Communion)	23	18.6%	Responses	
c. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	74	59.7%		
d. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	64	51.6%		
e. Prayer	91	73.4%		
f. Bible study	98	79.0%		
g. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	59	47.6%		
h. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	56	45.2%		
i. Reflection (think time)	92	74.2%		
j. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	43	34.7%		
k. Reading (non-biblical books with some connection with learning to know God and/or living as a Christian)	91	73.4%		
l. Creativity	31	25.0%		
m. Fasting	5	4.0%		
n. None	0	0.0%		



19. Of the spiritual disciplines already listed, which ones have contributed to a more mature PRACTICE of your work as an expression or extension of your Christian faith? (check all that apply)

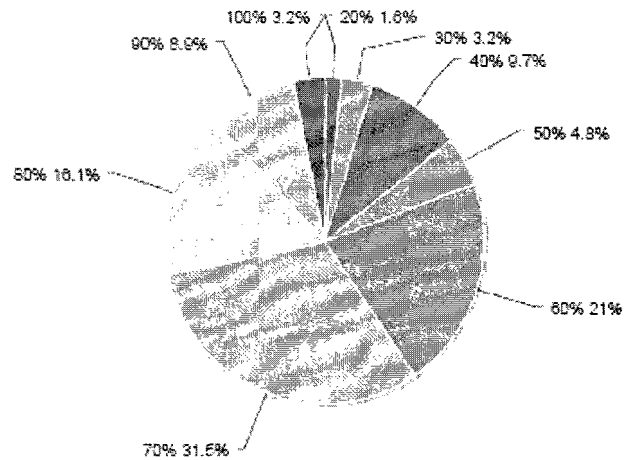
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
a. Congregational worship	54	43.6%	Total	124
b. Eucharist (Lord's Supper, Communion)	23	18.6%	Responses	
c. Christian fellowship (excluding Sunday services)	67	54.0%		
d. Group study (excluding Sunday services)	56	45.2%		
e. Prayer	80	64.5%		
f. Bible study	82	66.1%		
g. Service (meeting needs of neighbor and community)	66	53.2%		
h. Outreach (friendships with non-Christians)	65	52.4%		
i. Reflection (think time)	69	55.7%		
j. Writing (journaling, blogging, etc)	33	26.6%		
k. Reading (non-biblical books with some connection with learning to know God and/or living as a Christian)	68	54.8%		
l. Creativity	28	22.6%		
m. Fasting	4	3.2%		
n. None	0	0.0%		





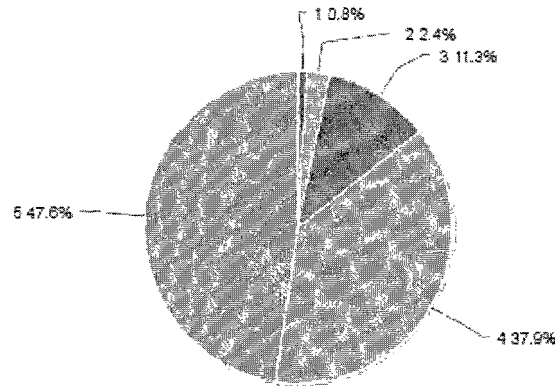
20. To what degree do you believe your work is presently connected with the rest of your life? (1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	3	2.4%	Sum	545.0
3	10	8.1%	Avg.	4.4
4	46	37.1%	StdDev	0.7
5	65	52.4%	Max	5.0



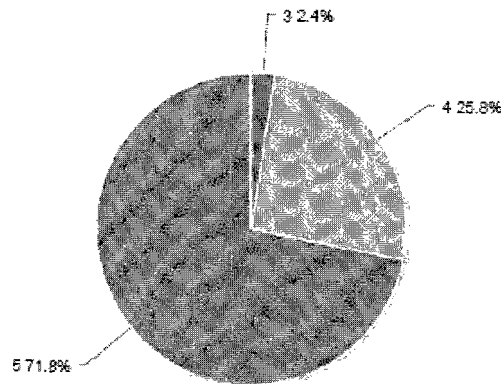
21. What percentage would you estimate your work and work related activity (e.g. preparation, reflection) occupies of your whole life?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
10%	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
20%	2	1.6%	Sum	8,220.0
30%	4	3.2%	Avg.	66.3
40%	12	9.7%	StdDev	16.9
50%	6	4.8%	Max	100.0
60%	26	21.0%		
70%	39	31.5%		
80%	20	16.1%		
90%	11	8.9%		
100%	4	3.2%		



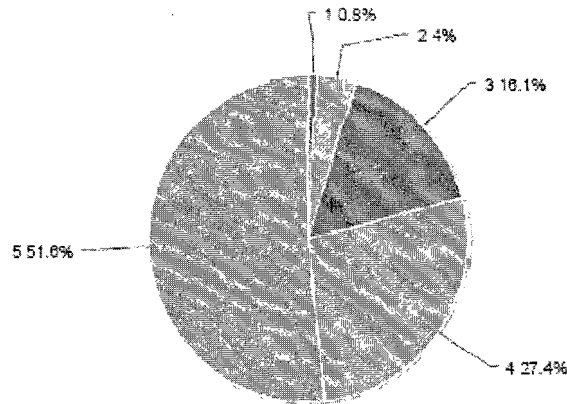
22. To what degree do you believe your work IS CURRENTLY connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	1	0.8%	Total Responses	124
2	3	2.4%	Sum	532.0
3	14	11.3%	Avg.	4.3
4	47	37.9%	StdDev	0.8
5	59	47.6%	Max	5.0



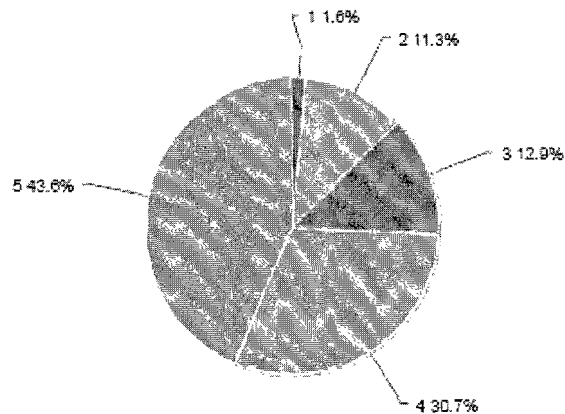
23. To what degree do you believe your work SHOULD BE connected directly with your life as a Christian disciple?(1 - not at all, 5 - in every way)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	0	0.0%	Sum	582.0
3	3	2.4%	Avg.	4.7
4	32	25.8%	StdDev	0.5
5	89	71.8%	Max	5.0



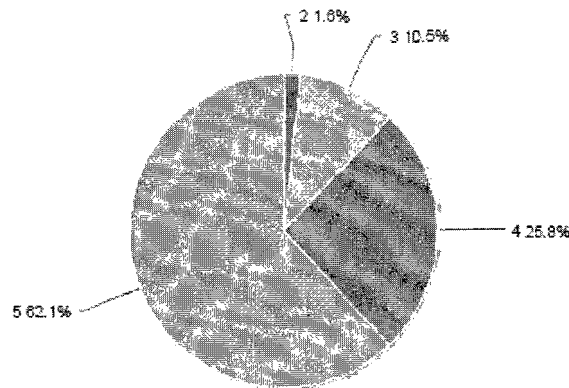
24. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's ongoing sustaining of Creation?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	1	0.8%	Total Responses	124
2	5	4.0%	Sum	527.0
3	20	16.1%	Avg.	4.3
4	34	27.4%	StdDev	0.9
5	64	51.6%	Max	5.0



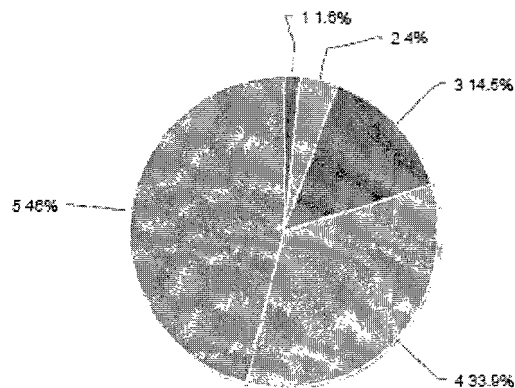
25. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's gracious work of restraining evil and corruption in the world?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	2	1.6%	Total Responses	124
2	14	11.3%	Sum	500.0
3	16	12.9%	Avg.	4.0
4	38	30.7%	StdDev	1.1
5	54	43.6%	Max	5.0



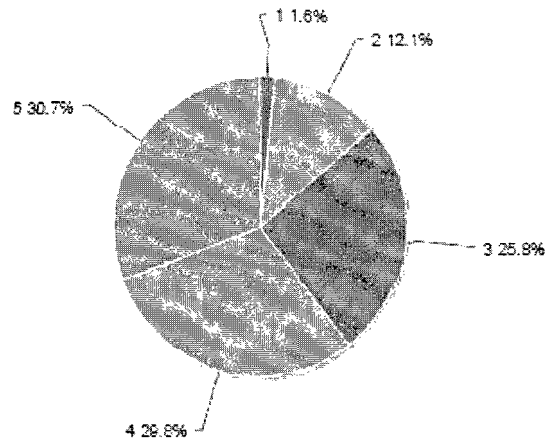
26. To what degree do you believe that your work is a participation in the kingdom and/or mission of God?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	2	1.6%	Sum	556.0
3	13	10.5%	Avg.	4.5
4	32	25.8%	StdDev	0.7
5	77	62.1%	Max	5.0



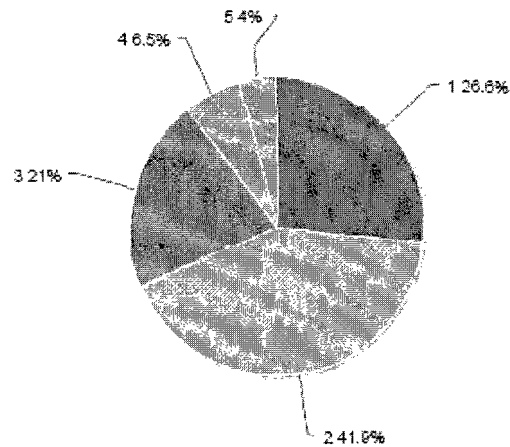
27. To what degree do you believe that your work is presently a participation in God's work to renew and redeem (transform) all things?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	2	1.6%	Total Responses	124
2	5	4.0%	Sum	519.0
3	18	14.5%	Avg.	4.2
4	42	33.9%	StdDev	0.9
5	57	46.0%	Max	5.0



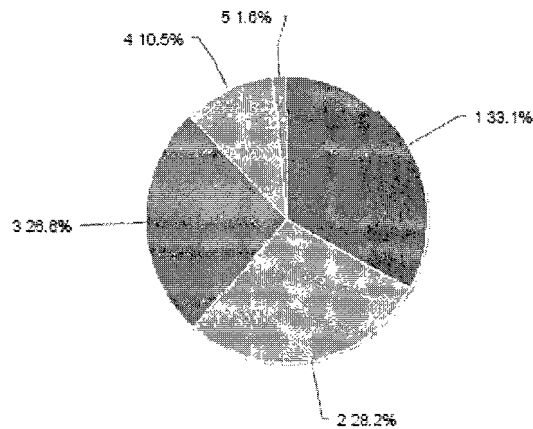
28. To what degree do you believe that your work is bringing hope or a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth promised at Christ's return?(1 - never, 5 - always)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	2	1.6%	Total Responses	124
2	15	12.1%	Sum	466.0
3	32	25.8%	Avg.	3.8
4	37	29.8%	StdDev	1.1
5	38	30.7%	Max	5.0



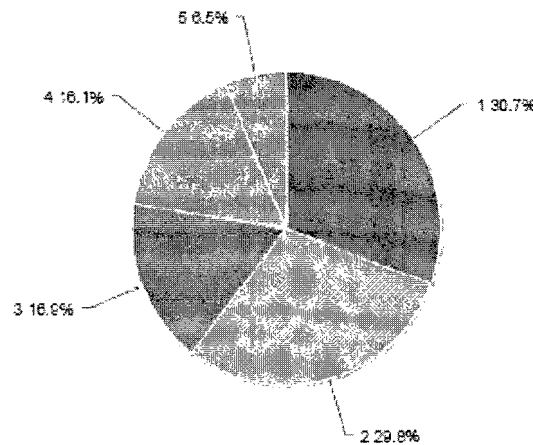
29. How frequently do you experience a sense of conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ?(1 - never, 5 - constantly)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	33	26.6%	Total Responses	124
2	52	41.9%	Sum	272.0
3	26	21.0%	Avg.	2.2
4	8	6.5%	StdDev	1.0
5	5	4.0%	Max	5.0



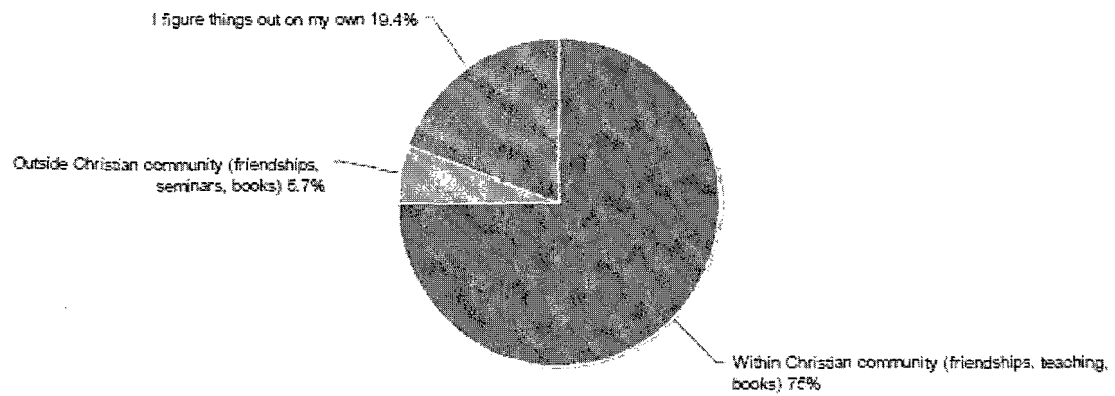
30. When you experience conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ, how difficult (generally) is it to find a resolution to that conflict?(1 - easy, 5 - impossible)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	41	33.1%	Total Responses	124
2	35	28.2%	Sum	272.0
3	33	26.6%	Avg.	2.2
4	13	10.5%	StdDev	1.1
5	2	1.6%	Max	5.0



31. How frequently do you generally find a solution to conflicts between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ?(1 - always, 5 - never)

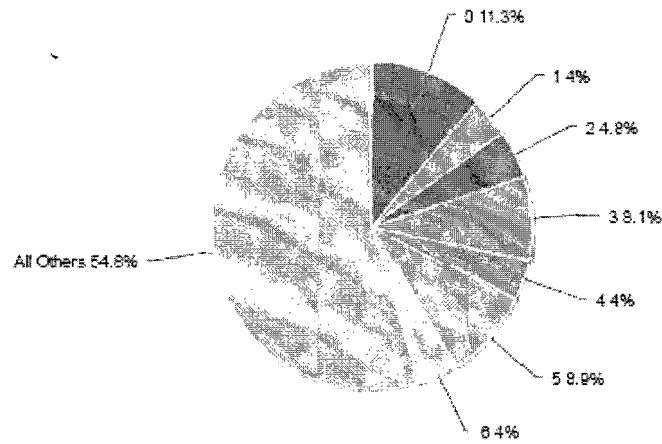
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	38	30.7%	Total Responses	124
2	37	29.8%	Sum	295.0
3	21	16.9%	Avg.	2.4
4	20	16.1%	StdDev	1.2
5	8	6.5%	Max	5.0



**32. Where do you most commonly find the resources to help you resolve a conflict between your commitment to your work and your commitment to Christ?**

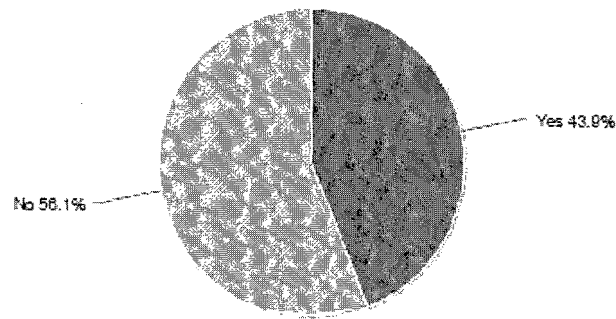
Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Within Christian community (friendships, teaching, books)	93	75.0%	Total Responses	124
Outside Christian community (friendships, seminars, books)	7	5.7%	Sum	55.0
I figure things out on my own	24	19.4%	Avg.	0.4
Nowhere. I can't find help anywhere	0	0.0%	StdDev	0.8
			Max	2.0





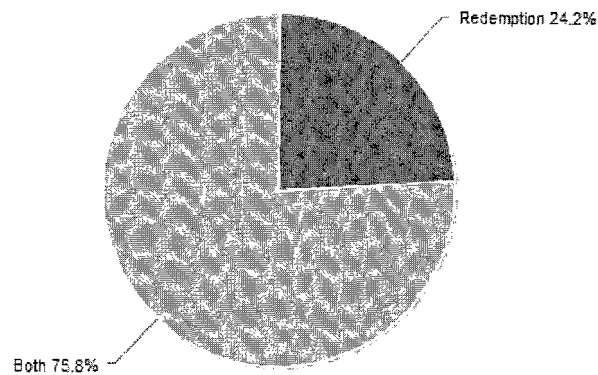
33. How many other Christians do you know in your local community who are engaged in work that is similar to yours?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
0	14	11.3%	Total Responses	124
1	5	4.0%	Sum	877.0
2	6	4.8%	Avg.	7.1
3	10	8.1%	StdDev	4.3
4	5	4.0%	Max	11.0
5	11	8.9%		
6	5	4.0%		
7	2	1.6%		
8	4	3.2%		
9	1	0.8%		
10	1	0.8%		
11+	60	48.4%		



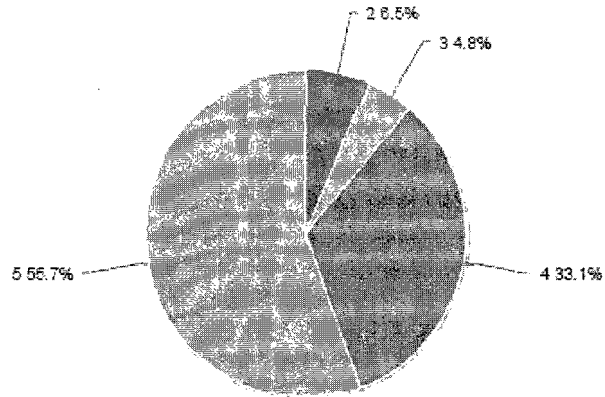
34. Is it your experience that the local congregations of which you have been a part have given adequate attention to the relationship of faith and work and the relationship of Creation and Redemption?

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Yes	54	43.9%	Total	123
No	69	56.1%	Responses	



35. Is the Mission of God primarily about:

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
Creation	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
Redemption	30	24.2%		
Both	94	75.8%		



36. To what degree do you agree with this statement: "Redemption brings Creation to completion"? (1 - not at all, 5 - completely)

Value	Count	Percent %	Statistics	
1	0	0.0%	Total Responses	124
2	8	6.5%	Sum	543.0
3	6	4.8%	Avg.	4.4
4	41	33.1%	StdDev	0.8
5	69	55.7%	Max	5.0

## APPENDIX E

### **“MESSENGER”**

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird -  
    equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
    keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
    astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
    and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
    to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
    that we live forever.

by Mary Oliver

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